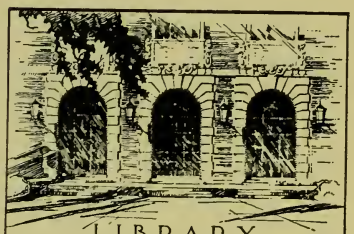

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THE TWO ARISTOCRACIES.

A NOVEL:

BY

MRS. GORE.

"Nous ne prétendons qu'à une chose; c'est à peindre avec fidélité les mœurs de notre temps dans un certain monde. Si le tableau est triste, nous espérons de la justice de nos lecteurs qu'ils voudront bien ne pas s'en prendre exclusivement á nous."—FOUDRAS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
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THE TWO ARISTOCRACIES.

CHAPTER I.

Mrs. Littlecote perused the letter again and again; dashing aside its froth of compliments and vulgar preamble of apologies, to reach the fatal poison in the dregs of the cup.

"When the agent employed by Mr. Robert Gresham applied to me, Sir, two months ago, for information respecting the property of the late Mr. Lambert," wrote Alick Ferrier,—"attributing his enquiries to unauthorised curiosity, I replied briefly that the estate left by

my deceased employer was valued at nearly £170,000, to be divided between his two daughters; his reprobate son, Zachary Lambert, having, fortunately for the family, died some years ago. I say fortunately, because his premature demise in the gaol where he was confined as a felon, afforded his only chance of escaping the guillotine.

"I now learn, Sir, that the enquiries in question were instituted by Mr. Gresham at your especial request; and as my erroneous statements were probably the means of determining you to take to wife one of the coheiresses of Matthew Lambert, I consider it my duty to afford you more authentic information. I find that, till the death of both daughters, the capital which constituted his estate, is to remain vested in the Bracknell Works; and that should either of them die childless, the surviving sister will inherit the whole. Each is to enjoy, for life, one third of the profits of the business, at present conducted

by one Barneson, the husband of the younger girl; by whom, as executor, the life-interest of the sisters will be distributed. To him, too, belongs the remaining third of the property."

The abject offers of service which concluded the letter were lost upon Mrs. Littlecote. Her eyes had become misty. An icy grasp seemed to have seized upon her heart. She, the haughty, defiant Rhoda—she, the happy bride of the honourable heir of Arden Hall—*she*, the sister of a felon!—She had often heard poor Zack lamented over as "wild," and "unfortunate." But that he should have been a criminal—the inmate of a gaol—was a death-blow to her pride. The honour of the name of Littlecote had indeed contracted from her alliance a blot upon its scutcheon!—

Frightful, however, as was the revelation, a still acuter pang was inflicted by the opening sentence of the letter. The past was the past:—irrevocable—remediless. But a whole life of

anguish was included in the discovery that she had been sought as a wife from interested motives; and that the delay of Rupert Littlecote in offering her his hand, had arisen from uncertainty as to the amount of her fortune. Bob Gresham had been employed by her husband to ascertain whether the Birmingham iron-founder had left behind him sufficient gold to gild over the stigma of trade!—

In the bitterness of her soul, she almost rejoiced that he had been deceived; and that, so far from being an heiress, and placing a vast amount of ready money at his disposal, she was the mere annuitant of a house of business. *She* had not misled him:—had never boasted—never spoken of her wealth. It was the cunning Gresham whose mercenary calculations were frustrated. It was the cunning Gresham, on whose head would fall the indignation of this baffled worshipper of Mammon.

For it must have been by the mere love of pelf that Rupert was tempted. The heir of

two fine mansions, and ten thousand a-year, could not be actuated by necessities which have stifled the better instincts of many an honourable mind. *His* path lay in the sunshine of life. His establishment was already luxurious. He had consequently stooped to hunt out the manufacturer's daughter for the base delight of adding thousands to thousands! All his protestations,—all his endearments,—all his impassioned glances,—had been weighed out to her by pennyweights. With "shekels of the tested gold," she had purchased every dear-bought smile.

And she must pass her life with this man, —this ignoble worshipper of the Golden Calf, —this well-born adventurer, who, when undeceived in his expectations, might at any time, throw off the mask, and insult her by contemptuous reproaches.

Such was her first view of the case. By degrees, came calmer, though not less painful reflections. The open letter would but acce-

lerate the catastrophe. Her husband would give no credit to her alleged motive for violating the seal. He had a right to tax her with vulgar curiosity,—with treachery,—with dishonesty. He had a right to ask what better he could expect,—he, Rupert Littlecote, of Arden Hall,—from the daughter of Lambert the manufacturer,—the sister of Lambert the felon!—

Moved by one of those impulses too often suggested by a turbulent temper, she tore the letter to pieces; then, throwing them into the empty fireplace, applied the taper by whose light she had been reading. A blaze,—an acrid vapour,—and all evidence of her fault was destroyed!—

But by the time the last spark had expired, she would have given worlds that she had been less hasty. She would have given worlds to restore the letter, to be retained as an accusing document against Ferrier should its assertions prove untrue. And what had she

gained by its destruction?—The man who, from officiousness, or far more probably, from malice, had supplied this gratuitous information, would probably write again. He was her enemy,—an enemy created by her wanton arrogance. Could she stoop to solicit the future silence of such a man?—Even if she obtained the concession, would not Mr. Littlecote learn, sooner or later, from other sources, the miserable, miserable truth?—

That a late division was to detain him at the House, that night, till long after midnight, afforded his wife some leisure for reflection. When he returned, she slept, or seemed to sleep. At breakfast, next morning, the plea, no feigned one, of severe headache, accounted for her heavy eyes and pallid cheeks. It was easy to make the heat of the weather an excuse for her languor.

Before they quitted the table, Gresham, as usual, sauntered in; and for once, Mrs. Littlecote examined with the utmost interest the

jaded countenance of the old beau. From its physiognomy, she hoped to learn whether any portion of her secret had transpired; whether he had obtained correct intelligence concerning her family and fortune. He was evidently out of humour; and when, at his request, Rupert walked out with him, ostensibly to devote his Wednesday-morning holiday to a match at tennis, she trembled lest the proposal might be a mere pretext for a confidential *tête-à-tête*.

And this was to be her destiny!—to watch with excruciating anxiety every change of countenance of her husband and his emissary; and, instead of devoting herself exclusively to the society of the man she loved, to avoid him, to mistrust him, to despise him; yet amidst all her evil interpretations, shrink from the recoil of his equally justifiable scorn!—

It was a long, a very long morning. At every ring of the door-bell, Mrs. Littlecote shuddered lest it should herald Rupert's

return. Fleecy, who was in town for a few days, for the furtherance of some Lambeth-Palace piece of jobbery, was to dine in Curzon Street, which relieved her from all fear of family discussions. And oh! misery, that she should already look forward with pleasure to the insipid intervention of that echoer of echoes!—

She was seated in her pretty drawing-room, fervently trusting that the Rector of Mattingley's professional punctuality would secure her from being alone with her husband, when Rupert glided in, smiling and well-dressed as usual; indebted, in some degree, for his distinguished air, to the whitest of French cambric and brightest of French varnish; but still more to the airy, graceful deportment which his wife, at their first acquaintance, had been apt to attribute to the instincts of aristocratic lineage.

As he stood upon the hearthrug, where, even when the grate is fireless, an Englishman

plants himself to await his guests, his *air noble* struck her, for the first time, as the disguise of an impostor. She saw in him *not* the gracious, graceful Rupert Littlecote; but the speculator who despatched agents about the country, to lie in wait for a provincial heiress!—

It would appear as if *his* thoughts, too, were straying to Birmingham; for instead of complimenting her, after his wont, upon her dress or charms, he inquired with much amenity whether she had heard lately from the Barnesons?—

Breathless with surprise,—for it was nearly the first time since her marriage he had named them,—she replied in the negative.

"But you have written to them lately?"

"I did not answer my sister's last letter."

"And why not, my dear Rhoda? She must surely be anxious to hear of your welfare."

"I waited till I had something definite to tell her of our prospects,—our projects,—"

"Till we had heard, in short, from my father?"

"Precisely. I fancied, too, that you did not wish me to keep up too close an intimacy with Birmingham—"

"Not with Birmingham, perhaps. But Mrs. Barneson is your sister—Barneson your trustee. It is above all things *necessary* that you should remain on amicable terms with your father's executor."

Rhoda was silent. How and when had he become aware of Mark's legal position in the family? She had never alluded to it. So dark became her brow as suspicions crowded into her mind, that Mr. Littlecote judged it prudent to attempt a livelier vein.

"I used to hear Mrs. Marsden impress upon my sister Helen," said he, "the famous lesson of La Fontaine,

On a souvent besoin d'un plus petit que soi.

In submission to which dictum, I advise you not to withdraw the light of your countenance from the nail-makers."

Rhoda would, perhaps, have expressed her astonishment at this strange accession of affability, had not Fleecy at that moment made his appearance, bleating plausible apologies for being late; and in presence of any member of the Littlecote family, any allusion to Birmingham seemed out of place. They were soon at table; receiving compliments on the *recherche* of their *entrées* and *bouquet* of their wines, in phrases overflowing with milk and honey. A mellifluous atmosphere seemed at all times diffused by the presence of Fleecy, as a fragrant one by that of the Gods of Greece. A silk-spinning insect, his very cobwebs glistened.—Negatives had no place in his accidence. "Exactly so!" was the everlasting Amen of the Rector of Mattingley.

But even had he perceived that dissonance prevailed in his cousin Rupert's household, he would have smiled on, and betrayed no symptoms of the discovery.—Like the rook that built its nest on the vane of Newcastle

spire, he was so accustomed to vacillation, that he revolved undisturbed and peaceful, whatever breezes might blow.

His ever-admiring eye was unluckily attracted, during dinner, by a beautiful string of pearls which, as the first gift of her husband, Rhoda had worn on her marriage-day. On that occasion, Fleecy had observed, and now repeated the observation, that such an offering was worthy of giver and recipient: predicting the pearls to be precursors of those adorning a viscountess's coronet; which on the recognition of Sir Arscott's claim to the Earldom of Arden, would fall to her share.

Poor Rhoda blushed crimson at the allusion. The ignominies revealed in Ferrier's letters seemed suddenly to blaze before her eyes, like the writing on the wall before those of Belshazzar; for she fancied she could discern an ironical smile on the countenance of her husband. He was probably connecting the future viscountness with the memory of Zack Lam-

bert, the felon!—Yet in her heart of hearts she doubted whether the more polished delinquent,—the lying, cozening, fair-spoken impostor,—were not, of the two, the greater criminal.

Perhaps had she known how painfully Rupert Littlecote had been made, throughout that day, to suffer for his fault, she might have judged him more leniently. But like most people who have been deceived by one in whom they placed implicit trust, she was disposed to exaggerate the evil-dealing of which she was the victim.

Her husband was in fact one of those unhappy men, who, as the song says—

Commencent par être dupes,
Et finissent par être fripons.

the class by whom the race of sharpers is fortuitously perpetuated.

On quitting college, already in the enjoyment of the late Lady Catherine Littlecote's

handsome fortune, the fashionable Bob Gresham had played the vampire with the heir of Arden Hall, as with many another ingenuous youth; initiating him into the haunts of vice, and instructing him in the expedients of the vicious. When, in process of years, the whole of his maternal inheritance had melted away in the betting-ring and other resorts of profligacy, and young Littlecote, though personally secured by senatorial impunity, began to despond over disgraceful embarrassments from which he was certain that his father would never relieve him, Gresham, after contriving to obtain a view of the title deeds of the Arden and Allonby estates, agreed to advance a sufficient sum, on a post-obit bond, to cover his more pressing necessities. The Mentor of the out-at-elbows Telemachus, was, just then, a man of capital. A turn of fortune's wheel at the celebrated *salon* of Paris, at that time a sort of Fortunatus's purse to broken-down adventurers, had poured into his pocket the

funds of brother *roués*, less fortunate than himself.

But the rheumatic gout of Sir Arscott, on which the crafty Bob had calculated for a speedy realisation of the cent-per-cent for which he had risked his advance, was so carefully nursed by his wife, that the old baronet survived to defeat, year after year, the cupidity of the fashionable usurer. And as it happened that a bad Ascot intervened to drain his resources, he grew so impatient for his money, as to become a living curse to his *protegé;* haunting him like a shadow, interfering with his pursuits, his diet, his pastimes. For the needy creditor could not afford to let him break his neck, or contract a liver-complaint or *delirium tremens,* during the lifetime of his father. Fleecy, the next heir to the property, complacent and amenable as he was, would certainly not consider it consistent with either his black coat or peer's robes, to book up the play-debts of his defunct cousin.

Gresham was painfully aware of a fact which others could only conjecture, that the patent caoutchouc and Desirabodes supplied him by the Palais Royal and Burlington Arcade, were threescore years junior to the antecedents originally furnished by Providence; and that if his own death should precede that of Sir Arscott Littlecote, no actuary would be surprised. At all events, he had too keen an eye to the main chance, to resign himself to the loss of ten thousand pounds.

Ths Easter visit to Arden Hall was as much a matter of business to *him* as of pastime to Rupert. The health of young Littlecote being somewhat the worse for bad hours and bad practises, it appeared desirable that he should be renovated by a mouthful of country-air during the parliamentary recess; and Gresham accordingly affected a passion for rook-shooting, in order to impart the mania to his young friend. Rupert was his property;—a farm that he cultivated—a ship,

in which his fortunes were embarked. He must over-look the crops,—he must underwrite his venture.—He must on no account lose sight of Rupert.

He did, however, lose sight of him, after all: —recalled to London by a message from a trainer who had discovered treachery in the racing-stable he was accustomed to back. And when Rupert, instead of following him to town the following day, as he had promised, wrote word that, so far from quitting Arden, he was likely to extend his stay till the crack of doom, having fallen in love, at first sight, with a young girl wearing the brow of an empress and a linsey-woolsey gown, who by a miracle of good-fortune resided at Arden and was a daily trespasser on his domain, Bob Gresham began to doubt whether it might not be more to his advantage to allow Mungo, Harum Scarum, and Zenobia's colt to be cooked, unmolested, and return to his post of observation.

A postscript appended to Rupert's letter decided the dilemma. "Don't be afraid, my dear Bob, of my being tempted by a beautiful face, in beautiful scenery, and beautiful weather, into the commission of matrimony," wrote the M.P. "I am as safe as though the nightingales were not on the spray, as well as the rooks on the bough;—as safe as if the deuced east winds of March were still blowing. For know that my charmer, though as highbred-looking a filly as if about to start for the Oaks, is the daughter of a Birmingham manufacturer!—Yes, positively! —Her father, head of the firm of Lambert and Co., who died last year immensely rich, was an iron-master, or blacksmith, or engineer, or founder, or Vulcan and Tubal Cain, know what!—Guess, whether I, who denied a plain gold ring, poor Caroline Gordon, am in the slightest danger?"—

That one word, "*rich!*" leavened the whole mass. What could the spendthrift, Rupert,

the ruined Rupert, do better than transfuse into the exhausted veins of his race, a little of the molten gold of trade? A Birmingham heiress was the very thing for him; far better than some wealthy offshoot from the outskirts of civilisation, the second-rate London world. Without losing a moment, he despatched to the scene of action one of the discreditable agents whom he called his "outsiders,"—who officiated as spies on the turf, or in any other capacity where want of character was a qualification rather than an obstacle,—to ascertain the standing and property of the firm of Lambert and Co.

The information he received,—how derived has been already shown,—determined him to convert the damsel with the brow of an empress, linsey-woolsey gown, and a fortune of seventy or eighty thousand pounds, into the Countess of Arden presumptive.—What mattered the displeasure of Sir Arscott, expressed or implied?—Rupert would, perhaps,

pay off his own claim with a portion of his wife's dowry. At all events, clamorous creditors would be silenced, and grist supplied to the mill of his too apt scholar, till the demise of the gouty old baronet.

When Rupert Littlecote, recalled by his parliamentary duties to town, arrived "sighing like furnace," unwilling to sacrifice his dignity, but still more reluctant to resign the beautiful Rhoda on whose heart he was conscious of having made an impression, his fit of sentiment was parried by Bob Gresham with a thousand jeers at his obsolete family pride. —"You, my dear Litt.," said he, "who call yourself a son of the century, and pretend that you would barter every parchment in your father's muniment-room at Arden, for a few thousand pounds in the three per cents., *you* to hesitate about marrying the girl of your heart, handsome, clever, and possessing a competent fortune,—merely because, like a fair waterlily, she springs from the mud?

Fie, fie! I thought better of your philosophy!"

But he did not confine his efforts to words. He took care that every ledger in which the name of Rupert Littlecote Esq., M.P., was inscribed on the debit side, should be ransacked to supply solicitations for the immediate settlement of his small account.—His "earliest convenience" was appealed to every hour of the day. Hints of writs and legal proceedings were added by some of the more vicious claimants; till the luxurious Rupert was beginning to find his bachelor bed in the Albany anything but a bed of roses.

"I can't pity you, my dear Litt., when you have at hand so charming an antidote to all this poison!" was Gresham's only rejoinder to his murmurs. And "Litt." who, after all, was a mere man of the world, gradually lost sight of his scruples about the prior claims of Caroline Gordon and the degradation of the Bracknell Works, and began to calculate the odds of the

match.—It was cunningly suggested to him by his Mephistopheles, that if the Lambert family were consulted, there was an end of his chance; that, as the state of his finances would not bear investigation, he must work upon the feelings of the beautiful recluse to marry him clandestinely and without a settlement. And no sooner did Rhoda vouchsafe her consent to this notable plan, than Gresham produced the money indispensable to its accomplishment. It was only adding another thousand to Rupert's liabilities, and securing to himself an early repayment; nor was it contrary to Bob Gresham's policy, as to Cæsar's, to angle with a golden hook.

That Rupert Littlecote, though not overweighted with principle, acceded to all this without certain qualms of conscience, is not to be supposed. But his case was desperate. The struggle was soon over. The arrangements for the wedding were speedily accomplished. Fleecy lent his willing aid to the

future Earl of Arden; and the fate of Rhoda Lambert was sealed.—Even Bob Gresham, was startled, however, when he saw how attractive was the unfortunate being he had selected as a victim.

"The handsomest young woman in England, my dear Litt.!" cried he, on the inauspicious wedding-morning. "You've won the Derby and Oaks in the same week: brought down a beauty and an heiress by a right and left shot. Take care, my dear fellow, that you're not indicted for monopoly!"

For some weeks after the arrival in London of the happy couple, he contented himself with keeping an eye on their movements: for it would scarcely be decent to expect the man so largely trusted by his bride, to plunge his hand prematurely into her pocket. But when he found that, though the season was drawing to a close, Rupert, absorbed in public duties and domestic happiness, had done nothing towards realising the fortune of the "Brum-

magem heiress," he had again recourse to the dirty aid of his outsider; and this time, worked his way considerably nearer the truth.

A copy of Matthew Lambert's will, procured from Doctors' Commons, set every mineral in his head on edge, and the patent caoutchouc *on* his head, on end! For lo! it appeared that the fortune of the "nail-maker's" heiresses was intangible during their lifetime; and that when married, the income of each was payable to her sole and separate hand!—In the course of the morning which Mrs. Littlecote supposed to have been devoted to the tennis-court, these galling facts had been placed, plainly and insultingly, before the eyes of her husband. Gresham, the plotter of plots, not only affected to have been taken in; but began to talk of enforcing his claims, in the tone of an attorney rather than of a friend or gentleman. He even accused the young bride of confederacy in the deceptions practised upon him.

But while Gresham resented his own

blunder, and cared not upon whom he retaliated, Rupert Littlecote exhibited in the emergency no small portion of the tact derived from the vile schooling of the world. Clamour or recrimination would not mend his case. His business was to keep all dark, and make the best of it. Having succeeded in obtaining the temporary forbearance of Bob Gresham, he had still to exercise his genius in wresting all authority from the hands of his wife without lowering himself in her estimation.

Instead, therefore, of lounging as usual to White's, the following morning, to ascertain from the papers what he had been doing in the House the preceding night, or the odds on the favourite for the approaching Goodwood, he made his way as invisibly as if he had worn the ring of Gyges, to the Inner Temple; to consult the artfullest dodger of his legal acquaintance; the sharpest among many sharp practitioners; a man usually denominated among his playfellows, the Loose

Screw,—concerning the safest mode of evading the provisions of the will of his deceased father-in-law.

Scarcely was he gone, when Rhoda, wearied by the dissembling and anxiety which for so many preceding hours had weighed upon her spirits, threw herself on the sofa of her showy drawing-room, to rest or weep, as nature might ordain: at enmity with herself, with her husband, with the whole world. Alas! the thorns of life were springing profusely from her crown of roses!—

She was under the influence of one of those great despairs, which fortify a strong mind, but overwhelm those of weaker texture.

Tears were gathering in her eyes, seared by the vigils of a sleepless night, when the butler made his appearance with a card.

"Would she please to see the gentleman, who was waiting?"

Unwilling to take the card from the salver lest the man should perceive the humiliating

moisture on her cheeks, and believing that the only gentleman likely to favour her with a morning call was Fleecy, of whose smiling assiduities the preceding evening had given her a surfeit, she replied hastily in the negative. But the spruce butler of Bob Gresham's providing, satisfied that the "gentleman" was a tradesman, calling for the settlement of one of those long standing accounts with which Mr. Littlecote's service had rendered him familiar, persisted in placing the card before her eyes; and lo! the names of

MESSRS. LAMBERT AND CO.,
Engineers,
BRACKNELL WORKS,
Birmingham,

met her astonished eyes.—Yes! Birnam Wood was come to Dunsinane!—Mark Barneson, disdaining to avail himself of their family connection to obtain access to the wife of Rupert Littlecote, had chosen to seek it as a matter of business. In the character of her trustee, he

was entitled to an audience; and after some perseverance and much patience, succeeded in obtaining it.

In spite of herself, the self-conscious lady of Arden Hall, as she rose to welcome with easy dignity the gaitered man so different in aspect from any other visitor to her new home, placed her hand cordially in his.

In spite of herself, she felt that in her father's homely executor, she had still a friend!

CHAPTER II.

Had Barneson's visit occurred a few days earlier, had he found his sister-in-law radiant and triumphant, or, as only the preceding night, arrayed in satin and pearls, he might have retained the formal reserved demeanour by which he intended to fortify himself against her insolence or affability.

But the cheek of the ennobled bride was wan,—her hair disdordered,—her morning dress carelessly adjusted,—her lip tremulous,—

her air dejected. She looked so much more like the Rhoda of Whortle Hill after a reprimand from Christina, than the future Countess of Arden, that instinctively he pressed her extended hand, and acquainted her, unasked, with the welfare of her mother and sister.

The warning he was come to whisper, was, perhaps, too late. Perhaps she already knew herself to be the victim of a speculation. Nothing less than such a discovery could have so completely subdued her. Mark had never shared his sister's enthusiasm for her beauty. The charm of her lustrous eyes was to *him* effaced by the harshness of their expression. But now, no longer the haughty Rhoda, she looked the very type of Judah, sorrowing in captivity.

"Are you in London on business?"— she inquired, as soon as her voice was sufficiently under command.

"On business;—on *yours*.—I was desirous to see you as soon as possible. I am anxious

to say a few words that dearly import your interests, but which it was undesirable to convey by letter."

"Not to be communicated by letter?"—repeated Mrs. Littlecote, affecting to smile away her alarm,—"Why so mysterious?"

"Only from the fear of wounding your feelings," he replied. "Mystery, as you well know, Rhoda, forms no part of my character. But not to keep you in suspense, I want, I *hope* to obtain a promise from you, that no consideration shall induce you to sign legal documents of any description, the contents of which have not been thoroughly explained to you by some lawyer of your own selection. You have a clear head, my dear Rhoda. You are perfectly qualified for a woman of business——"

Mrs. Littlecote lapsed into a genuine smile, as she remembered to what end those vaunted abilities had been cultivated by Christina Barneson—

"And you cannot exercise your vocation too

vigilantly," continued her brother-in-law. "It has come to my knowledge that you are likely to be exposed to solicitations, compliance with which would deprive you of every shilling you possess. You married without settlements. You are without redress. English law does little for the protection of wives betrayed by their natural protector."

"You mean me very well, no doubt," rejoined Rhoda, rallying her courage at this insinuation. "But your fears, believe me, are premature.—My husband is a man of fortune—a man of honour;—warmly attached to me,—incapable of doing me an injury—"

"A man of fortune," interrupted Mark, "but in embarrassed circumstances:—a man of honour,—but under the domination of men the reverse of honourable. That plausible rascal, Gresham, who originally suggested to Mr. Littlecote an alliance with you as a last resource against ruin, having ascertained how

stringently your fortune is tied up, wishes him to extort from you a power of attorney that would place him in possession of your income—"

"Extort from me?"—

"By persuasions and caresses, if these are likely to prove successful;—if not, perhaps by menaces, or force."—

"Stop!" cried Rhoda—with genuine indignation, — something of her former spirit — something of her unfortunate brother's spirit—sparkling in her eyes.—"Say what you will to humiliate me.—Prove that, by Gresham's intervention, I have been made a fool,—a dupe,—a victim. But not another word against my husband. You do not know him, Mark Barneson. You cannot appreciate the responsibilities of his position in life. Rupert may have been wild; and amidst the excesses of fashion, become indebted to this designing Mr. Gresham.—But that he is so much in subjection to him as to choose a wife

at his bidding, then, plunder and misuse her, losing sight of all the chivalry of his caste, all the affections of his nature, all the decencies of life,—is utterly untrue. Yes, Mark Barneson, utterly, *utterly* untrue!—"

A mournful waive of the head was the sole rejoinder of her brother-in-law. Willingly would he have given credit to her assertion. But his intelligence was too authentic for doubt.

"You are now on your guard," said he, "and by your own judgment, dear Mrs. Littlecote, you must stand or fall. Having fulfilled my mission, I leave town to-morrow. My wife is unapprised of the motive of my absence. Just now, I endeavour to spare her every cause for anxiety. Lettice must not be harassed. And though my sister and Ferrier will take care that no unpleasant rumours shall reach her ear—"

"Ferrier?"—interrupted Mrs. Littlecote, unguardedly. "*He* spare my sister anxiety,—

he who, for malice and envy's sake, would not hesitate to inflict on any member of our family every mortification, every pang, in his power? — He who has done me irreparable injury;—who—"

She paused. It suddenly occurred to her that the nature of the injury inflicted, it was out of her power to explain. The suppressed letter must not be alluded to. If Ferrier were to be taxed on the subject, what hope that her husband would forgive her having tampered with his papers, and obtained an insight into his baseness?

Shocked by her vehemence, Barneson did not encourage her to proceed. Towards Ferrier she had always been unjust; nor was her present exasperated mood likely to render her more impartial. But that he regarded her accusations as an ebullition of temper, he might, on this occasion have obtained such an insight into the vindictive character of the man so detested by his sister-in-law, as, whatever his

zeal and abilities as foreman, would have prevented his eventual admittance into the firm of Lambert and Co.

Mark now rose to bid Mrs. Littlecote farewell. But, harassed and resentful of his frankness, she did not a second time extend her hand.

"We are not likely to meet again, for some time, Rhoda," said he; "and perhaps it is best. Henceforward, all business-communications between us, shall pass through the hands of my solicitor. But remember that, should you at any future moment desire my services, or feel the want of a friend—" His utterance failed. The mere supposition that one of the daughters of his generous old master could ever find herself friendless, was a thing too painful to contemplate; and with a hurried gesture of farewell, he was about to quit the room, when the door was suddenly thrown open, and the master of the house, elate and miling, made his appearance.

A culpable air of embarrassment instantly overspread the face of his wife. To be found in seemingly intimate consultation with the man of whom she had spoken so slightingly the preceding day, appeared to convict her of hypocrisy.

To her surprise, however, Mr. Littlecote hastened graciously towards the stranger; and with the pleasant ease which at all times distinguished his address, inquired kindly after the health of his wife, as after that of a near relative.—

"On learning from my servant, just now, that a gentleman from the Bracknell Works was with Mrs. Littlecote," said he, "I broke through my custom of never intruding uninvited into her drawing-room (for which you must persuade her to forgive me,) that I might have the pleasure of making your acquaintance."

Constrained and distant was the reply of the man against whom Rhoda had fancied, at her

marriage, that the fastidious Rupert would conceive a disgust equal to her own. Though forced by Mr. Littlecote's civil entreaties to resume his seat for a time, he coldly declined the invitation to dinner urged by his new brother-in-law. He did not plead an engagement. He did not state that he was about to leave town. He simply said that it was "impossible."

A great relief to Rhoda.— There was no saying to what this effusion of politeness on the part of her husband might lead, when they were left alone together after dinner. Mark Barneson might not observe, towards one of his own sex with whom he was nearly connected, the delicate reserve he had maintained towards herself, concerning the delinquencies of her brother, or his miserable end. All the family degradations might transpire. On the other hand, Mark might extract from the inadvertence of her husband confirmation of her suspicions concerning the

mercenary motives of his marriage, and of his purposed appropriation of her fortune. Thankful was she to find her father's executor so little ambitious of the notice of his lofty connections.

By the time these ideas had passed through her mind, Barneson and her husband were engaged in conversation gradually becoming earnest; and her first impression was admiration of the dexterity with which the latter had led to subjects likely to be acceptable to his visitor. It was the period when—though the gauntleted grasp of high Toryism was still upon the land,—the voice of the people was beginning to make itself audible. The struggle between the trading and agricultural interests, between empty stomachs and overflowing garners, was already in progress. Rupert Littlecote, albeit the representative of a long line of Tories, fancied himself at heart a Liberal; and though he had braved for a thousand divisions the battle and the breeze

of parliament, his aye was oftener found wanting to the government-cause, than was agreeable to Sir Arscott. Foreseeing the revulsion of public feeling certain to follow the expiration of that Age of Or-moulu, the reign of George IV., he was perhaps preparing a raft to escape from the wreck.

Like other tactitians who systematically march with the times, he kept a vigilant eye upon the route before him; and from a man like Barneson, knew that valuable information might be extracted concerning the temper and projects of the manufacturing districts;—facts that would dignify, like fragments of marble, the scagliola-like surface of one of his polished speeches; opinions which, tossed up with his own spicy condiments, would supply a dainty dish to set before his club.

He was consequently working on his own account in interrogating the representative of Lambert and Co., concerning Chartists and Luddites,—Strikes and Leagues,—public meet-

ings, and private conventions, with a warmth of interest wholly misinterpreted by his wife.

She could not, however, but perceive when she gave her attention to the argument, that her rustic brother-in-law had the advantage. His language, if less choice, was more forcible. His views, if less comprehensive, were more definite. Unaccustomed to "speak" he did not talk for effect. She admitted that, though Rupert might be the more graceful fencer, the thrusts of Barneson struck to the heart.

To the hollow theories of his antagonist, he replied by facts and figures; as monkeys driven by the negroes into palm-trees, return with cocoa-nuts the pebbles with which they are pelted. Mrs. Littlecote was mortified to observe the sorry figure cut by the man of the world, denuded of his specious tinsel and brocade by the spear of Ithuriel.

"You never told me that this brother-in-law of yours was a man of remarkable intel-

ligence?" observed Littlecote to his wife, when Barneson, profiting by a pause in the conversation, took his departure. "I supposed him a mere tradesman; and find in him a mine of information. When next I cram for a speech, my dear Rhoda," he added with a smile, and scarcely perceptible shrug,—"I shall endeavour to get my meal out of Mr. Barneson."

Relieved from her fears that the interview might produce unpleasant results, Rhoda left the cause of her brother-in-law unargued. Her spirits were rising again. She could not, *would* not believe that a man whose manners and countenance were as open as those of her husband, could be so uncandid as she had been led to suppose. He had been misunderstood. He had been belied. Never had she seen him so charming as during the morning-drive which they took together in her open carriage. Throughout dinner, he amused her by lively anecdotes—and gleanings of club gossip.—

Never, since the early days of their courtship, had she found him so thoroughly agreeable.

As there was no business of importance before the House, and it happened to be one of those delicious midsummer evenings, when all London, on tiptoe to rush out of town, betakes itself as far as possible to rural resorts, —eating its dinner at Greenwich or Richmond, and completing its digestion at Vauxhall,—he even proposed an hour's enjoyment of the fresh air supplied by the mingled vapours of gas and gunpowder, with turf and foliage nightly refreshed by libations of punch and soda-water.

Feverish and restless, Rhoda readily complied. A *tête-à-tête* amidst the noise of fireworks and an orchestra clattering with Turkish cymbals, would be less embarrassing than in their solitary drawing-room, with its single lamp; and throughout the drive, and even when, in their stroll through the Gardens,

more notice than is usually agreeable to a newly-married man was bestowed upon a beautiful face and figure new to the public eye,—a woman whose very simple dress denoted anything but a desire to attract,—he appeared in the cheeriest of humours.

He took pleasure in naming to his rustic companion every person of note or notoriety who happened to be present; applauded the fireworks, listened to the music, waited ten minutes for the carriage without a single exclamation against his dilatory servants; and drove home again through the refreshing night-air cooled by the adjacent river, with the appearance of having enjoyed as pleasant an evening as he had conferred on his companion.

As they stood together, soon after their return home, beside the little table on which the butler usually placed their lighted bed-candles, he expressed this feeling in a few affectionate words that went straight to the

heart of Rhoda, and roused a thousand pangs of remorse and contrition.

"By the way, Pussy," he added, as she took up her candle, "as I find that Barneson is to remain in town till to-morrow afternoon, it will be but civil if I leave a card for him at the Hummums.—Perhaps, however, I may find him at home; in which case, as we are likely to go abroad so soon, shall I seize the opportunity for a little business-conversation? As you have deigned to endow me with your worldly goods, and taken me for richer for poorer, I suppose that upon *my* shoulders will devolve the duty of treating with your trustee. —You may as well, therefore, give me a line to him, entitling me to be your representative in the firm of Lambert and Co. In the morning, you can affix your signature to an order drawn up for the purpose."

Mrs. Littlecote set down her candle. Her hand trembled too much to hold it. *This*

then was the end and object of the gay evening she had been spending!—*This* was the origin of her husband's lively narratives and recent words of endearment!—*This* was the premeditated treachery announced to her by Mark!——

"Pardon me," said she, fancying she had succeeded in suppressing any betrayal of emotion, "I have no need of a representative. I am in the full and free enjoyment of my faculties. It would be defeating my father's intentions were I to delegate to any one the management of my affairs: and I shall, therefore, sign no legal document of any description."

The Minister who on applying to Louis XV., for the name of the person to whom he was to render his accounts, received for answer —"To myself!"—could not have been more amazed than Rupert. What!—the daughter of a Matthew Lambert establish her father's

authority against that of her husband?—Rhoda, his beautiful Rhoda, his adoring Rhoda, deny any request of his urging?—Above all, from interested motives!—

"You misunderstand me," said he—really hoping that he had been misunderstood. "I merely want you to empower me to act in concert with Mr. Barneson, on your behalf."

"I am already acting in concert with him," was her cold reply. "My father, anticipating, probably, that I should marry a man whose property and duties would fully occupy his time, empowered me to effect the administration of mine with his executors,—my mother and Mr. Barneson. There is consequently no need to trouble you with the tedious details of the Bracknell Works. My income will be transferred half-yearly to my credit with the bankers who act for the firm."

"You speak as if you entertained some mistrust of my interference," remonstrated

her husband, in a stern and almost menacing voice.

"None whatever," she replied,—her own tremulous with rising indignation. "But I do not choose that my affairs should pass into the hands of a fashionable Commissioner of Bankruptcy, like Mr. Gresham!"

This was speaking somewhat plainly. She was on her guard against both himself and his Evil Genius. She had evidently been warned. But so scornful was the expression of her Juno-like eyes, that her husband was unwilling to provoke additional explanations, or a further insight into her temper and mind.

He must wait. He would brave the worst and wait. Gresham and the rest of his creditors might be appeased for a time. But never, so long as he lived, would he pardon the woman, who, in the first glow of bridal affection, could thus suddenly close her heart and purse against him;—he, who for her sake, had braved the accusal of his own conscience, the

sneers of society, and the malediction of his father.—He must wait : but Rhoda, the miserable Rhoda, would gain nothing by the suspense !—

CHAPTER V.

Events followed fast in the perturbed household in Curzon Street. Next morning arrived the long-expected letter from Italy!—Not, indeed, in the handwriting of Sir Arscott; but this did not alarm his son: for during the old baronet's frequent attacks of gout, Lady Littlecote or Mrs. Marsden usually officiated as his amanuensis.

In the present instance, it was the latter who addressed him.

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"Unwilling to startle you, my dear sir, by too sudden a shock," she began, "I shall abstain from using a black seal or mourning paper for this letter. But you must prepare for bad news. You must prepare for the worst. Very shortly after your last communication to poor Sir Arscott, he underwent an attack differing in character from any of his preceding illnesses.—The physician here declared from the first that his danger was imminent; and had he not forbidden Lady Littlecote and myself to communicate the slightest hint of his precarious state of health, you would have been duly apprised. I need not inform you that his will was law in the house; and, as the prohibition was daily renewed, we dared not expose ourselves to his displeasure, or his impaired constitution to the irritation of learning that he had been disobeyed.

"On Friday last, a second attack came on; and this morning, in spite of all that medical

art could effect, he breathed his last:—refusing, to the last, to admit his danger, or sanction your being summoned. As it was always Sir Arscott's desire to be interred in the family-vault in Arden church, the body will be embarked for England as soon as a vessel can be chartered. But her ladyship, overcome as she is both in body and mind by nearly a month's incessant watching, begs me to say, that she is certain no will has been executed by your late father. Sir Arscott had a strong objection to such documents; which he declared to be invariably projected by lawyers, for purposes of their own. At her ladyship's marriage, a legal settlement confirmed to her a dower of one thousand per annum; for which, as well as a sum of twenty thousand pounds for the benefit of her child or children, the Arden estate is chargeable. To this, your sister Helen will be entitled; but the whole residue of the property, including a considerable amount of savings

vested by Sir Arscott in the funds, will devolve upon yourself. Lady Littlecote begs me to add, that there is a large sum lying in the hands of Messrs. Drummond; and a sufficient amount in those of the banker here to defray all necessary expenses, and her journey home.

"It is somewhat early, and may perhaps appear somewhat indelicate, to enter into these details. But as some time may elapse before her ladyship can arrive in England, to be thus explicit may spare you some uneasiness.

"The Dowager Lady Littlecote proposes to be in London in time to attend the funeral at Arden. She will proceed to the house of one of her sisters, in Gloucester Place; and trusts, my dear sir, to find in you now, as always, a friend and protector for herself and child."

Rupert Littlecote—*Sir* Rupert—was inexpressibly shocked. To blind himself to the fact that filial rebellion had been the means of accelerating the death of his father, was impossible; and though far from a dutiful or

affectionate son, he was well aware that he had been the object of as warm paternal tenderness as the leathery heart of the old despot was susceptible of feeling. By his disrespect, by his breach of family principle, he had killed the poor old man!—

It was only accordant with the frailty of human nature, that he should vent upon Gresham, and even Rhoda, his rage against himself.

For more than an hour did he sit motionless, with the letter open before him, revolving the past—the present—the future; and dissatisfied with all.

His wife, shunning a *tête-à-tête* after the scene of the preceding night, had luckily signified that, slightly indisposed, she should not come down to breakfast. An early visit from Bob Gresham was the first interruption to his meditations.

Certain that the important intelligence he had received could not have transpired, Sir

Rupert accepted his greeting without affording any hint of his accession of dignity.

"I've brought you the paper we were talking about yesterday, Litt.," said he. "The moment your wife has signed this power of attorney, you'll be authorised to act in her name. Mayes, who accommodated you last year, will have no objection to advance three thousand (out of which, by the way, I hope you won't forget to repay me the thousand I lent you two months ago?) for which you are to give him a mortgage upon Mrs. Littlecote's life-interest in the Bracknell works."

The individual so cavalierly addressed as "Litt." accepted in silence the paper tendered; but only to tear it in half, and throw the pieces into the grate.

"Are you *mad?*" cried Gresham, too much astonished to forestal his movements. "Is money so plentiful with you just now, that you can afford to fling away five guineas—the price of the document you have destroyed?"

"But since it was valueless?"

"Valueless only till signed; good, afterwards, for three thousand pounds."

"Mrs. Littlecote has refused to be a party to the transaction. Mrs. Littlecote declines to sign away her rights. She retains the administration of her own affairs."

"In that case," retorted Gresham, roughly, "I beg to decline any further interference in your own. You have the game in your hands, Litt., and if you can't or won't play your cards better, throw them down at once, and stand your losses. For my part, I'm sick of the whole concern."

"You might say it more civilly," was Rupert's mild rejoinder.

"I'm afraid you'll find that civility is not a negociable security," was the rude retort. "What you want far more than fine speeches, is the means of satisfying Mayes,—your acceptances in whose favour fall due on Monday next. Don't count upon *me*. You should

have kept that confounded wife of yours in better order, and you must take the consequences of your mealy-mouthedness. Not another pound shall you ever humbug out of Bob Gresham!"—

"Even that very severe threat does not alarm me," replied Litt., with one of his blandest smiles. "I feel that I shall survive it."

Saying which, he rang the bell so briskly as to produce immediate attendance; attesting that the ear of the spruce butler could not have been far distant from the keyhole.

"Open the door for Mr. Gresham," said Sir Rupert, in a tone of voice that determined the man the chief adornments of whose face sat so loosely on it, to snatch up his hat for a hasty exit. Not so hasty, however, as to prevent his overhearing the supplementary charge of the exasperated Litt. to his Janissary:—"and should he ever call here again, be so good as to tell him I am not at home."

Choking with rage, Gresham repaired

straight to his attorney; to issue instructions of the most venomous description against his quondam *protegé*. But by this measure he was only six and eightpence out of pocket. The Globe of that evening announced the demise, at the Baths of Lucca, of Sir Arscott Littlecote, Bart., of Arden Hall, in the county of Warwick, aged 73; and as the new Baronet was not liable for the bonds of which Gresham was the holder till three months after the death of the late Baronet, all was safe.

Meanwhile, the evacuation of the Peninsula, or the Crimea, or the departure of the "man in possession" of some doomed house, can never have been more welcome to the aborigines, than to the new Sir Rupert the certainty that he should never again be browbeaten in his own house by the toothless, hairless, conscienceless individual, he had once been hoodwinked into calling friend!—

Already he had resolved that any letter

addressed to Curzon Street in Gresham's handwriting, should be returned unopened.

To declare war against a rogue, albeit a well-dressed one, was no very difficult matter. But with the wife of his bosom how was he to deal? Had it not been for the scene of the preceding night, what joy would it not have afforded him to hail her as Lady of Arden Hall,—to array her in the family jewels, the family honours, and feel that nothing was too costly for her youth, her beauty, her generous attachment. And now, to lavish distinctions upon one who mistrusted him,—who had refused him alms from her abundance,—confidence from her heart!—For the first time, he felt that he was justly punished for love-treacheries of his own, and that he had demeaned himself by his rash marriage. —His poor old father was right. Perfect congeniality was impossible between the Counter and the Chamber of dais!—

When Rhoda made her tardy appearance,

exhibiting the sort of sullen compression of mouth and contraction of brow which women assume to mark that they are prepared for opposition, he could not but smile within himself at the false dignity of her deportment.

But it was time for further explanations.

Mrs. Littlecote happened to be attired in a white muslin *peignoir*, adorned with bows of coloured ribbon, as well adapted to her age as to the season.

"You will have to lay aside those gaudy colours," he observed, perceiving that she was determined not to speak. "My father is dead. Considering the share we have had in accelerating his end, our mourning cannot be too deep."

Rhoda, really horror-struck, became pale as death; but it was less from grief at the intelligence communicated, than at the bitter tone in which, for the first time, her husband addressed her. The instincts of her sex, which are said to be as infallible as its judgment is

feeble, warned her that she had alienated for ever the heart once her own.

In faltering accents, she inquired when and where the event had taken place.

"At the Baths of Lucca; after severe illness, dating from the announcement of my marriage.—The silence of the family on learning it, ought to have excited my anxiety.—But it is too late now to dwell upon it.—Repentance comes too late!"

It was with much difficulty his wife repressed her tears. Had she, only the preceding morning, noted such sadness in the countenance of Rupert and such a tremour in his voice, she would have thrown herself into his arms, with the authorised tenderness of a wife, to comfort and to soothe him.

Now she *dared* not! He would be justified in believing that the alteration of his circumstances prompted her change of demeanour.

"Has Lady Littlecote written to you, Rupert?" said she, faintly.

"My father forbad his wife and Helen to hold any further communication with me. Mrs. Marsden has written—"

"To say that the family will return to England?"—

"To say that they will be here to meet the body of my poor father. His widow and child are to attend the funeral."

Rhoda could not, while he spoke thus sternly, presume to offer herself as their companion at the mournful ceremony.

"And *you?*"—she inquired in a tone of deprecation.

"As a matter of course, I shall officiate as chief mourner. No need that the world should be led to surmise, by my absence, that, after living for six-and-thirty years on good terms with my poor father, I ended by defying his authority, and bringing down his grey hairs in sorrow to the grave."

A sigh, how deep, how heavy, afforded the sole response of his humiliated wife.

"I shall go down immediately into Warwickshire," he added, "to prepare for the reception of my stepmother—*and of the dead.* As you have set up a standard of defiance to my authority, I ought, perhaps, to inquire whether it will suit you to accompany me?"—

Even then, had Rhoda given vent to the tears struggling within her,—had she, in those tones of a loving, repentant heart, whose sincerity it is impossible to mistake,—avowed her regret at having given him pain, all might have been remedied, all might have been forgiven:—for beauty in tears has an eloquence hard to be resisted. But she hardened her heart. Any avowal of penitence would seem to address itself to the rich Sir Rupert—the future peer—the proprietor of parks—the dispenser of diamonds!—

It was with the utmost hauteur, therefore, she expressed her willingness to accompany him wherever he thought fit to go.

"She would be ready in the morning;—that

evening, if he thought proper. Her brother-in-law had left town. There was nothing further to detain her."

From that moment, whether in addressing her or speaking of her to others, it was always as "Lady Littlecote."

Never again was she to hear from his lips the endearing name of "Rhoda." *His* Rhoda had ceased to exist. He no longer loved her as a wife. An insurmountable barrier, a hateful thought was perpetually interposed between them.—"You married me for money," was written in the face of Rhoda. "You married *me* for rank," replied the scarcely repressed sneer of her husband.

CHAPTER IV.

On the day the remains of Sir Arscott Littlecote were laid in the mildewed family-vault, a noble boy was ushered into the light of day in the humble precincts of the Bracknell Foundry.—A stout young nailer to supply the place of an infirm baronet!—So runs, from age to age, the balance-sheet of the human account. So jostle together, in the exits and entrances of life, the puppets in velvet and puppets in fustian, destined to fret their hour on its bustling stage.

Little as Sir Arscott had done in his lifetime to attach the hearts of either family or dependants, it was a mournful funeral; partly on account of the exuberant pomp with which the remains, brought so many hundreds of miles to be deposited at the feet of the weeping cherubim, were committed to the dust; and partly because Sir Rupert Littlecote was deeply moved by the sight of his mother's coffin, and the consciousness that the next to be added to that mouldering family heap, would probably be his own. But still more, because the widow and her child not only wept in all sincerity over the father and husband, whom for years they had tended with such unswerving duty; but were touched to the heart by their momentous reunion with their loved and lost ones,—the darling companions of Helen's childhood,—her mother's angels in Heaven.

But alas! on their return to the Hall, Rhoda stood aloof and undemonstrative, as

though scorning to share their affliction, from a mistaken supposition that they would disdain the sympathy of the upstart intruder into the family; and that her husband, so far from desiring a word of consolation from her lips, grudged her even the right of wearing mourning for a baronet of a dozen descents.

The dowager, indeed, fatigued and dejected, scarcely noticed the coldness of her daughter-in-law; while Helen, naturally shy, and conscious of having been forced to play an ungracious part towards the family at the Manor House, did not even venture to approach the silent bride of her step-brother. It was only Mrs. Marsden who, when some days after the funeral, the family circle was re-united, endeavoured to keep up some sort of conversation with Lady Littlecote; whose talents, as Rhoda Lambert, she had highly appreciated.

Instead, however, of encouraging the attempt, the neglected wife resented what she regarded

as the impertinent patronage of the governess.

When Mrs. Marsden took the liberty of expressing satisfaction that her sister Lettice should have "married the brother of that excellent Miss Barneson, and, scarcely more than a child herself, be already the mother of a son," Lady Littlecote, perceiving that the butler was lending an attentive ear to this episode of family history, checked her presumption by sullen silence.

Still, she gave her utmost support to her husband's petition that Helen and Helen's mother would for the present make Arden Hall their home. Sir Rupert, fond and proud of his sister, was eager for an arrangement calculated to throw a reserve upon the intimacies of domestic life; while Rhoda, daily more and more in awe of him, and more ashamed of her own cold-blooded mistrust, welcomed every interruption to their *tête-à-tête*.—Mrs. Marsden was about to quit her adolescent pupil for a

home of her own; and Rhoda entertained a hope that when the governess was gone, Helen, left to the instigations of an affectionate heart, would resume the habits and feelings of their former friendship.

But of the two sisters, Lettice had always been the favourite of Miss Littlecote; and now that Rhoda, thwarted and unhappy, had grown sad and taciturn, her society lost all charm for the intelligent girl, whose recent experience of the cheerfulness of continental life, did not dispose her for the sullens.

Helen Littlecote was herself a kindly and attractive girl. Irregular of features, and undersized in person, there was something picturesque and fascinating in the almost wild artlessness of her dress and address. A year in Italy had done much towards the cultivation of her taste and talents: for she had carried thither the elements of an excellent education, requiring only a more genial atmosphere to bring them into bloom. Her genius for music,

more especially, had benefited largely by sojourn in the land of song; and Rhoda, with all her inordinate self-value, could not but feel that, in point of refinement and accomplishment, her former playfellow had left her far behind.

There was no one to applaud poor Helen's efforts; no one to be captivated by her girlish beauty. She sang because she hoped to enliven her brother's evenings, after mornings harassed by the tediousness of lawyers and pragmaticality of agents; and because at the sound of her voice, the saddened brow of her mother became less gloomy.

The only person whom the strictness of family mourning admitted into the seclusion of Arden Hall, was Sir Rupert's obsequious kinsman from Mattingley; and the compliments of Fleecy invariably served to silence its little nightingale. Helen made no secret, indeed, of her antipathy to her enamoured cousin.

But six months of her mother's widowhood

had scarcely elapsed, when the departure of Mrs. Marsden afforded a pretext to the dowager to remove from the Hall. She fancied that her presence there was a constraint. —Unable otherwise to account for the coolness apparent between her stepson and his wife, she concluded that Rhoda was averse to her domestication in the house.

Fortunately, the long-arrived determination of Mrs. Lambert to abandon and underlet the Manor House, suggested a home sufficiently near her old one to place her family and pensioners still within her reach, and gratify Sir Rupert's desire for the society of his sister. And, dared we imagine that human beings could be the objects of sport to the omnipotent ruler of their destiny, the transposition of Rhoda and Helen,—the former at their first meeting, the inmate of the humble grange, the latter of the lordly hall, and now, their respective conditions, so strangely reversed,—might almost justify the supposition.

In the allotted dower-house of the widowed Lady Littlecotes, Allonby Priory in Sussex, the mother of Helen had declined to reside: an ancient conventual structure, one of the gloomy relics of the Reformation, little suited to the contracted span of a modern household. The quiet-minded woman preferred a humbler abode; and fortunate for Rhoda was the modest limit of her tastes; for, in the isolated position she had created for her herself amid the stately halls and echoing galleries of Arden, dreary indeed would have been her lot, but that the near neighbourhood of the Manor secured to her the cheerfulness of Helen, and matronly counsel of her mother.

For Lady Littlecote had now in prospect the cares and risks of maternity. With the snowdrops, was to blossom, at Arden Hall, what every member of the family trusted would be a son-and-heir. No one, perhaps, so much as Rhoda herself; who fancied that to have added so important a branch to the family tree, would

restore to her the alienated affections of her husband. When Mrs. Lambert made a short appearance at the Manor to resign her tenancy to the dowager, preparatory to settling for the brief remnant of her days in the home where her fore-elders had lived and died, and laboured and spared, in order to produce its present prosperity, she came, prepared with the love and forgiveness inherent in every mother's heart, to overlook the offences of Rhoda and rejoice in her happiness. But, alas! her daughter, conscious of the hollowness of her triumph, remained cold and reserved; fearful lest the poor old lady should penetrate the secret of her conjugal disunion, and bear back to the contemned Bracknell Works a hint that Lady Littlecote might have been a happier woman had she adhered to the level of Lambert and Co.

Endowed with moderate perceptive faculties, she did not notice with what interest poor Rhoda listened to the minutest de-

tails of Mrs. Barneson's domestic life;—how they all lived together, without a clash of interests;—how her ignoble brother-in-law doated upon his wife;—how Christina, with ample exercise, in a little kingdom of fifteen hundred souls, for the administrative powers which had formerly rendered her so meddlesome an inmate of the Manor House, was subsiding into a cordial, useful old maid; and how both parents, aunt and grandmother united in worshipping the young nail-maker, the hereditary prince of the Bracknell Works.

But if, after listening to gossip provoked by her own inquiries, tears gathered under the eyelids of the lady of Arden, her nature retained too much of Rhoda Lambert to admit of an open avowal of interest in the welfare of her kith and kin. On the contrary, she drew up with her haughtiest self-assumption, when Mrs. Lambert inquired whether, should her expected child be a daughter, she should not

name her Lettice? As to the old lady's kindly proposal that, as there was no longer a chance of a family meeting at the Manor House, she should drive over some day to Birmingham, to assure herself with her own eyes how much her sister had surmounted her lameness, and how beautiful and promising a boy was her little nephew, Lady Littlecote's negative was nearly as disdainful as her refusal of the hand of Alick Ferrier.

The old lady was neither surprised nor mortified. She expected no better of the child who, in the greatest step of her life, had disregarded all dictates of filial duty, or family affection. Besides, as she piously argued with herself, was it not written that a woman shall leave father and mother, and cleave to her husband; and what more natural than that Rhoda should attach herself to the handsome, stately, Sir Rupert, and find in the company of his sister and step-mother, a substitute for that homely family

circle to which she had always held herself superior?— A good Christian in the better sense of the word, Mrs. Lambert found a hundred pleas for leniency.—"Rhoda, like poor Zack, had her faults. But his father had pardoned *him*. She must not be less pitiful towards Rhoda."

Even a less indulgent heart, however, might have sympathised in Lady Littlecote's disappointment, when, two months after the departure of Mrs. Lambert and inauguration of Helen and her mother at the Manor, she was congratulated by them that the babe born to requite her for a mother's anguish, was a "beautiful little girl." Their gratulation was perhaps the warmer, because they hoped to palliate the vexation they knew she must experience. Meeting as they did daily, almost hourly, they could not but be aware of Sir Rupert's earnest desire for a son to inherit his impending earldom. Though unsuspicious that, to both, the accomplishment of

their wishes was doubly important, because this first-fruit of their unhappy union would be the last, they saw that to the domestic happiness of Arden Hall, such a pledge was indispensable.

Seven and thirty years had elapsed since the birth of the present baronet; and village traditions were still busy with the rejoicings that had taken place in honour of the event; the hogsheads of beer tapped — the oxen roasted whole—the bonfires blazing on every adjacent ridge of hills;—doles given to the poor, and balls and fireworks to the rich.—Everything had been surreptitiously prepared for a renewal of these festivities. Brushwood and faggots were piled; the stalled ox was fattened; the old October ready for the spiggot. And had the beautiful little girl whose soft cheek was nestled in her mother's bosom been twice as beautiful, how little would her beauty have availed to pacify the eager tenants; or to persuade Arden Hall

that its family tie had suffered no deterioration !—

That Rhoda would avow her disappointment, Helen too fully understood the arrogance of her nature to expect ; and that Sir Rupert would not utter one syllable expressive of *his*, his wife was equally certain. So far, the polished manners which had aided to conquer her heart, still justified her admiration ; for, deeply seated as was his enmity, no human being had a right to infer that his marriage was otherwise than happy. His deportment towards Lady Littlecote, whether in public or domestic life, was too easy and courteous to entitle his neighbours to whisper that she was not the most adored of wives.

To a heart so proud, this was some extenuation of her misery. She was certain, too, that whatever his feelings towards the unwelcome little girl born to them, whom by way of propitiation to the family she had decided to name "Althea" after the favourite ancestress

who still smiled in brocade in the Western gallery, he would never exhibit himself in the light of a disappointed father. It was not from the polished Sir Rupert Littlecote the world was likely to learn how utterly he repented his *mésalliance*.

Sunned in the smiles of the world, prosperous with that most gratifying of prosperities, release from difficulties, he was not the man to indulge in vexation of spirit. *His* philosophy taught him to surmount it. *His* philosophy decided that, after a nice balance of the good and evil allotted him, the good preponderated; and of the good, he resolved to make the best. If unable to wear in his heart of hearts the wife in whose qualities he had been so deceived, he would at least wear her as an ornament to his position in life. Though never to become the solace which his ailing father had found in *his* Lady Littlecote, she should do credit to the family diamonds at court balls and the incessant banquets

included among the duties of county membership. The patent of his re-privileged peerage was making out. Noble or ignoble, Countess of Arden, Rhoda must be; and the interests of his sister Helen, and of his little daughter the future Lady Althea Littlecote, demanded that his wife should take her place suitably in the world.

His two maiden aunts, Lady Lucy and Lady Leonora Bellasis, twin sisters of his mother, were prepared to afford her the utmost light of their countenance; and many of his aristocratic connections gathering round him, assisted by the best claret and best venison, rendered his house the rendezvous of the best society. His *entrées*, and his wife were pronounced to be the best-dressed in London; and the fine ladies, fond of exercising a little patronage, were charmed to find themselves canvassed by one of the most agreeable men about town, to accompany Lady Arden to the opera, or give a tone to her con-

certs.—A vague rumour was in the air that she was a manufacturer's daughter,—a nobody —or rather a somebody not quite the thing. But then, she pretended to be nothing more; and was so splendidly handsome, and, above all, afforded them such acceptable opportunities of airing their affability, that Arden Hall had never been better filled for covert-shooting or the Christmas holidays under the presidency of Lady Catherine Littlecote, than under that of the Birmingham heiress.

For the first few years of her marriage, indeed, she spared no pains to please. To uphold the dignity of her husband, appeared an act of duty. She fancied, too, that when he saw her doing honour to the rank in life he had lately achieved,—admired, courted, influential,—his early admiration might revive. To this ambition, her every act, movement, word, or even thought, was subsidiary. The royal arch-patron of surfaceism and seeming, then upon the throne, had pronounced the

young Countess of Arden to be the "*belle par excellence*" at one of his fêtes. But this tribute to her charms, which to Rhoda Lambert would have appeared a fiat of immortality, afforded only to Lady Arden a hope that it might reach the ear of her alienated husband. The utmost applause of those fastidious coteries which, in the latter days of George IV., created an atmosphere of exclusivism and impertinence such as the present day regards as fabulous,—would not have imparted half so much satisfaction as Lord Arden's slightest smile.—Her coronet?—She would have bartered it, with ten years of her life superadded, for one look of affection such as he lavished on his sister!—

His courteous deference towards her, was perhaps harder to bear, than would have been moroseness or severity. There was nothing in his conduct on which she could ground a complaint. That she had to deal with the cold polish of steel, instead of genuine flesh

and blood, was a confession to which, even to Lady Littlecote or her sister-in-law, her pride could not descend.

Still, with that sanguine trustfulness peculiar to the heart of woman, she hoped and hoped. Every year, every day, she saw that Lord Arden absented himself more and more from home. But, in compensation, *when* at home, he became more and more deferential; more and more desirous that her will should be paramount in the house. Once or twice, she had made an attempt to transfer to himself the income now amounting to three thousand a-year, to which she was separately entitled. But of this, he would not hear. On her persisting, he resumed the air of haughty resentment which she had once seen disfigure his handsome face, and never wished to see again.

After this rebuff, her only resource was to expend the fortune, to the safeguard of which she had sacrificed her wedded happiness, on

the embellishment of that portion of Arden Hall especially dedicated to her use. But if this afforded employment for her time, taste, and money, it afforded none for her heart. The paradise she was creating around her, was still solitary. There were moments, too, when inexplicable fears overpowered her. Whenever her husband appeared at the dinner-table out of humour, or out of spirits, instead of attributing the contraction of his features to cares or regrets of his own, (of which he had a liberal abundance,) she fancied that Alick Ferrier had been again working out his vengeance:—that he, or some other enemy, had disclosed to her lord the terrible story of her brother's disgrace. Nor was it till after a lapse of many years, that she attained sufficient self-command to adopt the philosophy of her lord; and endeavour to extract what comfort she might from the enjoyments within her reach. Though unadmitted to her husband's confidence, she took pride in his growing reputation as a public

man. Slowly, but surely, he was rising into renown. Destitute of the vigour of intellect indispensable to success in the House of Commons, in the Lords, his slipshod fluency passed for eloquence, and his quick perceptions for judgment. The restoration of an extinct peerage was supposed to have secured a prodigious acquisition to the Upper House; as the suit of obsolete armour so long valueless in a curiosity-shop, becomes a stately object when forming the centre of a trophy of arms, in some lordly hall.

Already, the Liberals began to dread the opposition of the new Lord Arden, in case of a serious contest for Parliamentary Reform,—then, the pet chimera of every active brain; and already, the new Countess fancied she beheld in her husband a successor to Canning, when that popular statesman should sink under the pressure of years, or laurels.

With the Barnesons, meanwhile, her intercourse remained as circumscribed, as with the

Earl. Every year, she heard less and less of them. She wore mourning with suitable decorum, when formally apprised of the decease of her mother; who expired full of years and honours where her life of duty had elapsed, at the Bracknell Works: cheered in her old age by the respect of the son-in-law so deeply indebted to her, and the love of her daughter and grandchildren. For, a year after the birth of the boy whom Mark had chosen to call Edward in memory of his father and gallant brother, a little girl was born; who, to gratify the poor old lady, was named after herself—Barbara; and those twain,—those promising children,—were the morning and evening star that brightened her path to the grave.

The little Lady Althea, whose age and name were recorded in Peerages and Court Calendars, she knew, like the Southern Cross, only by report:—too bright a constellation for the obscure horizon of Lambert and Co. If she ever thought at all of Rhoda, Countess of

Arden, Viscountess Littlecote, Baroness Allonby of Allonby,—it was as the mother of a Pope contemplates with awe and perplexity her glorified offspring of the Tiara.

Lady Arden, on the other hand, though apparently as little cognisant of Birmingham and its interests, as the dial-plate of a time-piece of the congeries of springs and wheels actuating its movements, was far from indifferent to the prodigious strides which the seven-league-booted giant, Trade, was making, to her advantage. Already, steam-power had become a monster-tyrant in the land; and Lambert and Co. were among its most influential Pachas.—Not only by the death of her mother, but by a prodigious accession of business, her fine income was doubled. Matthew Lambert's wise foresight had vested the control of the concern in a manager as eligible for probity as for intelligence; and all that remained incumbent on the Countess was to give a half-yearly receipt for her share of theprofits.

It was, however, so earnestly the desire of her brother-in-law that, once in every year or two, she should cast her eye over the details of the books, to ascertain the progress of the business, and the accurate allotment of her share, that she assented to his proposal that they should meet annually, or bi-annually, for the purpose, at his residence at Whortle Hill.

"An oath, an oath, she had an oath in Heaven," never again to set foot in Bracknell Works; and as Barneson was equally resolved never to visit her at Arden, the pleasant villa into which poor Mrs. Lambert had converted her favourite old grange on the Dudley Road, which she had purchased on quitting the Manor House and bequeathed to her youngest daughter, afforded a *mezzo termine* that contented the pride of one party and the conscience of the other.

There, every autumn, the wealthy manufacturers welcomed the noble Countess, (in whom

they still beheld Rhoda, *only* Rhoda,)—who made her appearance at an early hour and remained till late: scrupulously despatching her carriage to the nearest inn, lest her servants should convey back to the Hall, hints of the homely nature of her ladyship's connections.

No fear, at all events, that they should espy nakedness in the land. The household of the Barnesons was even more plenteously entertained than that of the Ardens. In most great houses, parsimony is an essential ingredient; the amount of retainers rendering a strict commissariate, and family order, as indispensable as in public establishments; whereas in a home like that of Mark and Lettice, there exists instinctive co-operation between head and hand. Early hardships, whether endured in our own person or the persons of those dear to us, extend the sympathies of fellow-creatureship.

When the visits of half a dozen successive

autumns had satisfied Lady Arden that they were accomplished without involving the families in too close an intimacy, she began to take pleasure in the glimpses thus afforded of the household happiness of her childhood's playmate; as good, as kind, and scarcely less lovely than of old. Time seemed to have passed her by on dove-like wings; so tenderly had he spared those feminine features, and that slender form. Still slightly lame, her infirmity imparted to her gait the languor said to have constituted one of the chief attractions of the beautiful Duchesse de la Vallière.

At the period of Lady Arden's visits, Edward Barneson was absent at school. But while she knew her handsome nephew only by report, the beauty of little Barbara inspired her at once with delight and envy. Her own girl, indeed, was far handsomer; but Lady Althea was deficient in the harmony of nature peculiar to the offspring of a happy marriage.

So many times had her sister inquired of

the Countess why she never brought her little girl with her to Whortle Hill, and so evasive were the replies, that at length the plain-spoken aunt Christina to whom her dear Barbara was an object of adoration, blurted forth the simple question of whether Lord Arden did not desire that the cousins should be acquainted?—To reply in the affirmative, would have been a falsehood of which his wife was incapable; for Lord Arden took no sort of heed of the comings or goings of his wife or daughter. Nay, had he expressed any wish whatever concerning the Barnesons, it would probably have been kind and conciliating.

The following year, therefore, Althea was brought by her mother on a visit to Whortle Hill.

CHAPTER V.

The meeting was an epoch in the lives of the cousins; between whom there existed the same slight disparity of years and enormous disparity of character, as between their respective mothers. They had now nearly attained the age of Rhoda and Lettice when first consigned to the homely teaching of Christina Barneson. But Lady Althea was already a first-rate musician. As in the case of her aunt Helen, much of her musical genius

was intuitive. But the best professional instructions had improved the gifts of nature; and for two preceding years, a Roman lady of high qualifications, with whom Mrs. Marsden and her pupil had become acquainted during their sojourn in Italy, had resided at Arden Hall. Both aunt and niece spoke the Italian language fluently; and sang it with the purest intonation.

After listening to a performance such as neither his wife nor himself had ever enjoyed an opportunity of hearing, Barneson was for a moment guilty of the same envious pang experienced by Lady Arden at first sight of the sunny beauty of her niece. But he soon recognised his error. How would accomplishments of that showy description have availed his little daughter?—Lady Althea was fated to shine in the great world. A beauty, an heiress, *she* could not cultivate refinements of too high an order. But his little violet,—his darling Barbara,—was born for the shade;

and ought not to compete with this full-blown rose. Hers must be the song of the linnet, not of the nightingale. Were not these two children representatives of the antagonism of the rival aristocracies of modern times?—

The sensitive Barbara, meanwhile, if she argued less cogently about the matter, was conscious in every fibre of a new and delightful enjoyment. The beautiful little stranger, so exquisitely dressed, so gifted in speech and song, might be a miracle of talent and art. But she was also to be loved and cherished, as her cousin,—her flesh and blood:—to *her*, who had never possessed a sister, the nearest and dearest of relatives. How happy she felt, while watching the graceful movements of Lady Althea!—How much she wondered whether many more such beings existed in the world; and whether Edward would prefer her to his sister!—Lady Althea, too shy to make much demonstration of

her feelings, was scarcely less favourably prepossessed.

"Go with your cousin, Althy!" said Lady Arden, when Barbara proposed taking her to visit the aviary. And both sisters followed their children fondly with their eyes, as, hand in hand, they quitted the room. This natural sympathy in the generation that was to succeed them, seemed to unite once more their long alienated hearts.

"How my poor mother would have delighted in your daughter!—How proud our parents would have been of her!—How like—how *very* like she is to poor dear Zack," faltered Mrs. Barneson, as soon as the door closed upon the girls.

Lady Arden was unable to repress a shudder at this reminiscence of one whose memory had furnished, for years, the one dark shadow blemishing her sunshine. She saw that she must not encourage her sister to revive family traditions.

"Lettice seems as fond of birds as you used to be of those poor old sickly pheasants at the Manor House," was her own nearest approach to the past.

"Not Lettice, — *Barbara*," replied Mrs. Barneson, with a tearful smile. "My girl is named after our mother; my son after his father's father."

"Would you believe that the old raven is still extant, and not a feather the worse since the days when he used to chase away poor Grypp from the strawberry beds," pursued Lady Arden, apparently afraid of being led back step by step to the Bracknell Works. "My sister Helen is still fonder of him than you were."

"Is Miss Littlecote as pretty as when a girl?" inquired Mrs. Barneson, a little startled at hearing anybody but herself called "sister" by her own Rhoda.

"As pretty,—and still intitled to be thought a girl," said Lady Arden with a smile. "He-

len is two years younger than we are. Helen is scarcely eight-and-twenty."

"Yes,—a girl,—because unmarried. But when I look at Edward, who is very tall of his age, I begin to feel an old woman."

"So Helen says of herself, when singing with her niece."

"But a niece is so different from an own child!" pleaded Lettice,—as slow of perception as of old.

"Not to the aunt in question," rejoined Lady Arden. "Althy is all in all to her. A mother could scarcely love her better."

"She would love her children better, were she to marry," persisted Mrs. Barneson, stedfast on any point involving maternal affection.

"But Helen will never marry," said Lady Arden, positive on all subjects. "Helen is wedded to the name of Littlecote, and Arden Hall. As shy as ever, she seldom talks, except to her brother; and scarcely

seems to feel, except for her mother or niece."

"But what a pity," pleaded the tender-hearted Mrs. Barneson, "that she should not enjoy the real happiness of life!"

"She perhaps escapes much care, much disappointment.—Is not Christina Barneson quite as happy as ourselves?"—

"Not so happy as if she had married poor Zack, — my husband often regrets having helped to prevent that match,—but happier certainly than if she had married Ferrier. She must think so herself, when she sees his hard, selfish, domineering manner with his wife."

"You still associate then, Lettice, with that odious man!" said Lady Arden with ineffable disgust.

"Associate with Ferrier? — Why, he is a partner in the firm. *He* thinks, indeed, that it ought to be changed to 'Barneson and Ferrier.' But Mark will not hear of it. My

father always wished that, during our lifetime, it should remain Lambert and Co."

"What on earth can it signify!" exclaimed Lady Arden, out of patience. "Who knows or cares what it is called, or how it is written?"

"Hundreds of people—thousands—tens of thousands!—You have little idea, dear Rhoda, how important the business has become. The firm of Lambert and Co. is known all over the world. The name is quoted in city articles; the name is—"

"And whom did Mr. Ferrier marry after all?" interrupted Lady Arden, endeavouring to tame down her irritation.

"A Miss Mac-Something, an excellent match for him: — cousin to some Scotch baronet. (I wonder you never heard of them, Rhoda; for the family reside in London.) —And she is as proud of her good birth and handsome fortune, as Ferrier of his rise in the world. Chrissy fancies that they look down

upon *us;* on account of old Mr. Barneson's misfortunes, and his widow being matron at St. Margaret's."

The pale cheeks of Rhoda flushed for a moment: not at being reminded of these untowardly family connections,—which, sooth to say had no place in her memory,—but because she thought it far more likely that Mrs. Ferrier's disdain arose from her initiation into the family-history of Bracknell Works; and the knowledge imparted by her malicious husband of the evil courses and evil destiny of the unfortunate Zack.

"We do not see much of the Ferriers," added Mrs. Barneson, after waiting in vain for a reply.—"Chrissy keeps up her old grudge against Alick; and my husband, though he considers him a tower of strength to the Bracknell Works, and fully appreciates the subordination he has established among the men, avoids his society out of business-hours.—Mrs. Ferrier gathers round

her only rich, dinner-giving people. Mark prefers a quiet life. Whortle Hill is more to his taste. He was country-bred you know. It was chance that made him a manufacturer: he was meant to be a farmer."

Lady Arden was perhaps of opinion that he still looked the character. But her thoughts were occupied with Ferrier; the mention of whose name had revived a thousand painful associations. Ferrier, rich and independent, was more to be dreaded than Ferrier the foreman. Yet even when seemingly powerless, had not his vindictive revelations impregnated her life with misery; and might he not, if his revengeful enmity were revived by the knowledge of her brilliant and triumphant position, again launch from his quiver some venom-steeped dart?—

As they returned homewards to the Hall, she had hardly strength to reply to the thousand inquiries of her daughter concerning the dear aunt and cousin whose sweet faces

were as fascinating to *her*, as to themselves her own graceful movements and Italian accent. Even the kind Mr. Barneson who had placed her on his daughter's pony, and presented her with a collection of his prize auriculas, came in for a share of her enthusiasm. He was so cordial,—so real,—so different from the only near relative of her father with whom she was acquainted;—the specious, vapid, ever-smiling Fleecy!——

But it was worse when, next morning at breakfast, she began enlarging to her father on "the beauty of cousin Barbara's lories, and the fine Taxonia suspended like rose-coloured draperies along the walls of aunt Barneson's conservatory." Whortle Hill, though a nutshell compared to the Hall, seemed to have taken possession of her imagination.

"There was a lady, not so young and pretty as my aunt Barneson, who inquired very much after *you*," said she, addressing Miss Littlecote. "Barbara called her aunt Chrissy;—

yet I believe she was once a governess. Barbara talked too, about grandmamma Barneson, a very old lady, who is matron in some hospital in the south of England. Are they *my* aunt Chrissy and grandmamma Barneson, as well as Barbara's?"——

Helen looked anxiously towards her sister-in-law, hoping she would dictate an answer. But it was the ever-ready Lord Arden who spared the embarrassment of all parties by replying—

"No, Althy,—neither your grandmother nor aunt. But connections, by marriage, of your mother's family; and as such, entitled to your respect."

"I am glad of that," said the young girl, frankly. "I should not like to have an aunt who had been a governess. All the governesses I ever saw were teachy and lessony."

"I knew Miss Barneson, many years ago, Althy,"—interrupted Helen, good naturedly, "and she was then a charming person"—

"And charming or not," added Lord Arden, "let it suffice, darling, that you meet her under the roof of your aunt, to secure her from unkind remarks."

For a moment, his wife was thankful to him. But the feeling was soon obliterated by the conviction that in doing violence to his opinions, he was only desirous to humiliate her by the greatness of the concession.

"It is difficult to be thoroughly satisfied with any one," says La Bruyère. But between a husband and wife not rendered *one* by genuine attachment, daily and hourly displeasures arise like weeds in a garden. Of late, Lord Arden had been more than usually attentive. Yet his civil mention of the Barnesons could scarcely be sincere. For at the moment when the thumb-screw of Parliamentary Reform was applied to the borough-holding aristocracy, Lord Arden had not scrupled to make advances to his brother-in-law, (whose influence with several Liberal members was

supposed to be considerable,) which, as regarded their object, were a failure.

Ever on the look-out for grievances and evil motives, she fancied therefore that, in the general election just then impending,—an election which was to create the new Magna Charta of the Reform Bill,—the influence of Barneson in Birmingham as well as in the county, might be an object to the Earl. She heard and saw so much, just then, of electioneering manœuvres, that even the ordinary civilities of life became matters of suspicion.

"I should so like,—so *very* much like to have my cousin Barbara here to stay with me," said Lady Althea to her father, encouraged by his graciousness. — "And she would like it quite as much herself. Barbara, though her aviary is so beautiful, has never seen a deer, or an air-plant, or a picture gallery. And she wants above everything to hear me or Aunt Helen play the organ in the Chapel."

"You must ask your mother, Althy. Do

you think it could be managed?" he inquired, turning to Lady Arden.

"Certainly *not*," was her ungracious reply. "My brother-in-law has already declined our invitations. No one can be better aware of the misery that arises from unequal connections."

Lord Arden was answered. Shortly afterwards, he quitted the room, with feelings of resentment against his wife which had been long dormant. Would she *never* consent to cultivate the olive-branch, which, for the sake of her child, he was disposed to plant?—Would she labour to the last, to render his home distasteful?—

Could he have surmised, how often, after being goaded by consciousness of the falseness of her position into one of these outbreaks of temper, the woman who retired in seeming sullenness to her own apartment, passed the remainder of the miserable day in tears of repentance, or on her knees in prayer,

he would perhaps have done more than simply extend the olive-branch. He would have pressed for an explanation. He would have brought the wrongs and rights of their quarrel to an equitable balance; extenuating the faults of his wife, and admitting his own.

But in conventional life, such reconciliations rarely occur. "Blessed," indeed, would be the "peace makers," if their broad-brimmed society, instead of endeavouring to suppress Oriental wars, and put down Transatlantic insurrections, were to establish a Tribunal for the tranquillisation of domestic grievances, and the conclusion of conjugal jars!—

CHAPTER VI.

Lady Arden did not wait for the expiration of another year to re-visit Whortle Hill. But when she went again, it was without notice, and unaccompanied by her daughter.

At the announcement of her name, Mrs. Barneson started up with a joyful precipitancy foreign to her movements, to welcome and fold her in her arms. Her arrival was a pleasure all the greater for being unexpected. But the gentler sister understood her too well to ask

why she came, or why Lady Althea was not her companion. Too much curiosity might prevent the tenacious Rhoda from renewing the surprise.

But they had not been long seated together, before Lettice had other feelings to repress besides curiosity. The change in her sister's appearance since their last meeting, filled her with alarm. She was then a beautiful young woman; and now, after the lapse of a few months, had become wasted, haggard, old. She must unquestionably be suffering from some painful malady, or from mental distress.

With tears in her eyes, Lettice ventured a slight hint of her anxiety. But it would not do:—Lady Arden laughed so wildly at the imputation of indisposition, as to redouble her sister's solicitude.

"What should ail me?" said Rhoda, incoherently. "If ever woman had her will in this world, it is I;—with nothing to complain of, dear Lettice;—nothing,—nothing—*nothing!*

—Did you ever in your life hear me complain? —When reproved in my girlhood by my poor father,—when talked down at Bracknell by Mark Barneson, or lectured by Christina,—did you ever know me complain?—No, no, little sister!—I was not born to be a whimperer.—But where is your husband, Lettice, I want to see your husband!"

Mrs. Barneson was spared the necessity of reply by the entrance of Mark, in his fishing jacket and gaiters. Nor was there any need to name the handsome lad who followed him into the room as his son Ned. His resemblance, his startling resemblance to Lady Arden herself, and necessarily to the unfortunate Zack, was a sufficient introduction.

But save as regarded the painful reminiscence thus revived, the Countess was charmed with her nephew. There was a prompt and easy graciousness in his address, which she had formerly associated exclusively with aristocratic nature. Cheerful and unabashed, Edward

inquired frankly after her daughter, of whom he said "his sister Barbe had talked to him so much." The young nailer did not appear to stand much in awe of her coronet and supporters!—

The untoward habit of the Barnesons of living during holiday-time in common with their children, threatened indeed to frustrate the object of her visit,—a confidential interview with her brother-in-law. But this must not be. While he retired to divest himself of his somewhat moist fishing habiliments, preparatory to luncheon, she whispered to her sister her desire to be left alone, for a few minutes, with her trustee.

Under that plebeian roof, hints were unknown. The mother of Edward and Barbara frankly informed them that their aunt and their father had business to transact, and led them away.

From the ghastly complexion and agitated manner of the Countess, Barneson began to

fear that it was of an alarming nature. But she did not keep him long in suspense.

"You have often endeavoured to make a woman of business of me, Mark," said she; and Chrissy had previously done her best towards the same purpose."

It was the first time since her marriage that the familiar name of "Mark" or "Chrissy" had passed her lips. Her brother-in-law misgivingly noted the concession.

"And now," she continued, "I am content to adopt the vocation. I want to be instructed and assisted in the art of money-making."

"In the *art*, I was in hopes I had already assisted you," rejoined Barneson, cheerfully.—"If you have looked over the abstract of our last balance sheet—"

"I have, I have!" — interrupted Lady Arden. "I am fully aware that, thanks to your activity and intelligence, my income has been in the last twelve years more than doubled. I trust I have not appeared un-

grateful; though, from circumstances, perhaps more careless about money-matters than becomes my father's daughter. But my views are changed. I am becoming as mercenary, Mark, as the rest of the world. Avarice is said by a great authority to be "an old gentlemanly vice." I suppose I must hold it as a proof of being an old woman, that I am growing quite as great a curmudgeon as my fellow creatures."

Barneson, who saw in her face grievous evidences of her advance in years, was candidly silent.

"I have set my heart on becoming a capitalist," she resumed with a forced smile. "For some years, Mark, I did my best to squander the thousands you were working so hard to transfer annually to my account. I built, decorated, gardened, farmed,—did every thing within compass of those whom Mr. Ferrier of Bracknell, calls fine ladies,—to get rid of my money."

Other modes by which even fine ladies might creditably disencumber themselves of their cash, perhaps suggested themselves to Mark Barneson, But he kept silence, that she might proceed.

"In spite of all my wastefulness," she continued, "Messrs. Cronin of the Birmingham Bank have still in their hands about eleven thousand pounds of mine, which I have kept there, to meet any emergency."

"A large sum to be lying idle!" observed the man of business, gravely. And Lady Arden was not likely to avow that it had been so left in the hope, now frustrated for ever, that, at some happier moment, the earl might condescend to accept it at her hands.

"I now want you to invest it for me in the name of my daughter," she resumed.—"I married, as you once reminded me, Mark, without settlements. Althy has consequently no fortune."

"But this ought to be rectified by Lord

Arden, either by deed or will," rejoined Barneson. "You should remind him that the entail of the Arden estates will leave his daughter portionless, unless charged during his lifetime."

"It would not suit me to appeal to him on the subject. The utmost I can do in my girl's behalf, is to lay aside for her all I can spare."

"You are the best judge of your affairs," said Barneson, aware that, best or worst, she would abide by no other judgment. "As regards an investment, you must perceive, if you have examined the statements I laid before you at the last audit of our Bracknell accounts, that I have myself invested in the works thirty thousand pounds (the savings of our double share in the profits,) for which the business pays me six per cent. If you consider it desirable, and your legal advisers recommend it, *your* balance can be annually entered, in the manner you propose."

"Thirty thousand pounds, already!" mused Lady Arden aloud.

"Our expenses have never amounted to fifteen hundred a year. Yet you perceive that we live in the utmost comfort."

"Lettice was always a better manager than myself."

"My sister is our manager. My dear wife, thank Heaven, has been able to live a life of love and ease.—Her sole care is the happiness of her husband and children—"

"You consent, then," interrupted Lady Arden, ill-prepared to listen to a description of the domestic happiness of other people, "to become Althea's trustee?"

"But during your lifetime, what need of a trustee?"

"Human life is uncertain. It would be satisfactory to me to know that, in case of my death, my daughter would not be wholly dependent upon her father."

"In the event of his lordship's decease with-

out heirs male, his estates descend, I think, to his cousin, the rector of Mattingley?" inquired Barneson, consideringly.

"Mr. Littlecote is Lord Arden's heir-at-law; my husband, if I die intestate, is mine. And as I object to make a will,—a needless exposure of family affairs,—I wish, during my lifetime, to assign my fortune to my daughter. See your lawyer on the subject, Mark, and ascertain how it can be done."

"On a former occasion, when I presumed to advise you on financial matters," said he, "you observed that—"

"No matter what I said or did *then!*—I was young,—I was not a mother,—and I was a wife—" She checked herself, as if fearing she might be betrayed into saying too much.

"There is one point to which it may be as well to draw your attention," rejoined her brother-in-law,—apparently entertaining the same apprehension. "The investment you

propose must be confided to a person against whom you have always entertained a prejudice. Ferrier, now partner to a limited extent in the firm of Lambert and Co., is of course one of the supervisors of our books."

Lady Arden started. Her pallid face became for a moment suffused with what could scarcely be called a blush; for it was the flush of anger.

"In that case, I retract my proposal," said she, hastily. "I will have nothing to do, directly or indirectly, with a man like Ferrier. Yet stay," she resumed, after a moment's reflection. "Cannot the money be invested in your own name?"

Barneson paused ere he replied.

"Such an arrangement could certainly be made. But in case of either of our deaths, it might be difficult to prove the right of Lady Althea to the money, independent of Lord Arden's control."

"I am not afraid. I place it entirely in

your hands and at your discretion," she persisted. "You are not the man, Mark, to live a day without having executed a will. Add a codicil to yours, expressing that the sum in question is Althy's property; or bequeath it to her, as a benefaction of your own."

By this proof of confidence, Barneson could not but be touched. He was too clear-sighted however, not to perceive that Rhoda,—Rhoda, *still*,—was acting upon some impulse of passion which overcame every antipathy, and every scruple.

"I will do all you desire," said he, "if, (since Lord Arden is not to be consulted,) you will ponder a week over your project, and have some legal deed drawn up, securing the destination of the money."

No! Her mind was made up. She would have no legal interference. She relied implicitly upon *him*. Life was precarious. She had brought with her an order upon Messrs. Cronin for the sum under discussion.

He could receive the amount, and at once complete the investment."

As she spoke, the cheque was taken from her pocket-book, and placed in his hands: and so peremptory was Lady Arden's manner, and so agitated her countenance, that he had not courage to harass her by further opposition.

"At least, let me give you a receipt for so large a sum," was all he ventured to observe. But even this hold upon his honour, she declined. She did not wish such a document to be found among her papers. His power over the disposal of the money would be more absolute if it passed as his own.

Then, as if to silence his recognition of trust so unlimited, she began to talk about his boy, —"A noble fellow," she called him—"as intelligent as he was handsome."

"You are more fortunate than I have been," she added in a dejected tone; "and to me, what would it not have been to possess such a son! The wife of a peer who has supplied no heir

to the family, is an incumbrance to her husband —a tax upon his successor."

Barneson hazarded in palliation some kind and complimentary remark about her promising daughter.

"Poor child,—poor child!" she murmured, slightly shivering. "But tell me Mark,—what do you intend doing with your son?"

"What most men do with their sons. Ned is to be endowed with his father's fortune and calling. Ned is to be a nailer," said he with a proud smile. "Our savings are for Barbara; for a double share in the Bracknell Works, will secure to her brother some seven or eight thousand a-year."

"Then why not send him to Eton?—"

"Because I had rather he learned to increase his fortune than to squander it."

"But in order to form advantageous connections for his future life—"

"It was not at Eton his father formed the connection which *he* has found so advanta-

geous!" rejoined Barneson, with grateful warmth. "Let Ned be half so fortunate in his schoolboy friendships, and I am content. He is at Winchester; where my brother was educated, and where he finds a home with my family."

Again did a gleam of colour appear on the pale cheeks of Lady Arden.

"You think, perhaps," added Barneson, replying to it, "that my amended prospects ought to inspire me with higher ambition: that the matron of St. Margaret's and a race of tradespeople, will do little to elevate his sentiments or improve his acquaintance. It may be so, but I am content. The culture of the affections is to *me* one of the highest branches of human education. Ned is brought up among those who love him, and whom he loves; and runs no risk of becoming too fine a gentleman for the Bracknell Works."

A moment afterwards, he regretted having uttered what might appear to be a sarcasm

on Lady Arden. But she was in no mood to be resentful; and when, immediately afterwards, they rejoined the family circle, she had satisfactory evidence in the gentlemanly deportment of her young nephew, that he had acquired nothing objectionable in the gloomy old parlour of St. Margaret's, and lost nothing by companionship with his kin.

When Lady Arden and her four handsome bays retook the road to Arden Hall, she left behind her the germ of feelings as perturbed as those which had prompted her journey. She had unwittingly scattered around her those barbed thistle-seeds of worldly folly, which where they alight so readily take root.

Every human mind, however strong, has its weak bastion;—every human heart, however hard, its soft corner;—every human frame however rugged, its vulnerable heel. Mark Barneson, though firm and sensible, was staggered by the flatteries of Lady Arden.

On a former occasion, he had resisted the

advances of her lord; disgusted by their interested nature. But within the last year, the relations of the two great English aristocracies had been completely changed by the popular triumph of Electoral Reform; a measure of which time and progress may have taught us the short-comings, but by which the relative position of patrician and plebeian was greatly modified. A tyranny was overpast which had yielded either a rod of iron or bunch of feathers, according to the temper and intellect of the scourger and the scourged. Of the two boroughs which, time out of mind, had worn like well-fed flunkeys the Littlecote livery, one was metamorphosed into a ragged village, "sans ears, sans eyes, sans taste, sans" parliamentary representative; scheduled out of the world of politics as a superannuated pauper is shovelled into the grave: —while the other suddenly endowed with independence, had fluttered out of its chrysalis like "Gisèle" out of the tomb, and was

displaying its wings in wonderful flights and evolutions.

In this borough, which Mark Barneson had been publicly and unsuccessfully solicited to represent, Lord Arden was desirous to secure his influence for a candidate of his own nomination. Even in the county which half a century before had kissed the toe of Arden Hall, the head partner of the firm of Lambert and Co. stood high in popular estimation, as the most impartial of magistrates and liberal of men.—An enlightened chairman and open-handed patron of every public charity, his voice was of the highest account; and no one better knew his value in public life, than the brother-in-law who despised him in private.

The Earl was too much a man of the world to "let I dare not wait upon I would," when he had a selfish object to accomplish. *He* had not vowed a vow against setting foot in the Bracknell Works; and as twelve years had elapsed since the evil counsel *supposed* to have

been given by Barneson to his ward, without renewal of the offence, or any intrusion or forwardness on the part of the family, he did not hesitate to pay a personal visit to the man who could as surely return a member for Droneham as Sir Arscott Littlecote had done in the bad old times.

His sudden act of condescension was accepted for what it was worth; as an electioneering manœuvre. Barneson received the visit of his noble brother-in-law as he would have done that of any other gentleman on business: and having assured him that he did not intend to exercise the smallest constraint over the political opinion of his workmen, or influence over that of his friends, waited for his further "commands."

They consisted of a courteous entreaty to be presented to Mrs. Barneson; and as she was luckily established for the summer at Whortle Hill, he was deprived of the sight of a lovely face and a gentle demeanor, well

qualified to convince him that in the sister "with the brow of an empress," he had chosen by far the less charming of the co-heiresses. In Lettice, he would have beheld the exact embodiment of a beautiful sketch by a modern poet.—In Lettice, he would have seen one who

—dwelt apart from early youth
In gentle household ways;
Contented with her mother's smile,
And with her father's praise.
Hers was the grace of quiet born,
Of fancies gay and pure;
Of trusting love that could obey,
And strength that could endure.

Beauty from simplest actions rose,
And harmony from strife;
So kindly did her spirit fuse
The elements of life.
Hers was the hand that freely gave,—
The ready smile or sigh,—
The cheek that true to feeling flushed,
The bright and upward eye;—

and hers the fitting meed of unalloyed household happiness.

How different from the woman, who, for years had presided like a statue of Nemesis over his *lares* and *penates!*

But if Lord Arden's visit failed in its purpose, the opinions he let fall, casually, or perhaps intentionally, concerning Pauperism, Public education, and Free trade in all its ramifications, were far more liberal than Barneson had attributed to so extensive a landlord. His allusions to his wife and daughter, too, were worthy of a model-family-man. The representative of Lambert and Co., far too busy in his calling to be a fetcher and carrier of scandals, knew little of Lord Arden's private life; and consequently accepted as genuine several clap-trap sentiments which had been carefully burnished up for the occasion of a visit to the Works; just as he would have provided himself with blue beads, and brass-headed nails, for a visit to a colony of Redskins.

His Lordship took his leave with specious

professions of regret that he could not persuade his brother-in-law to return his visit at Arden Hall. But he carried away from the Bracknell Works impressions very different from those he had previously conceived of the consequence of Lambert and Co.—All discussions of a pecuniary nature had been long, by tacit consent, dropped between himself and the Countess; and of her vast accession of income he knew nothing. Nor, as the subject of his derogatory alliance was supposed to be unacceptable, had any one, at any period, alluded to the prodigious business in which her fortune was embarked.—

The Earl was astonished, therefore, — he, so proud of his well-trained household and well-conditioned labourers, and their decorous muster at the funeral of the head of the family, or to do honour to some royal prince progressing through the country,—at sight of the tens of hundreds of hands submitted to the rule of Lambert and Co.,

and the bevy of clerks in their counting house. For the din of hammers and anvils, —furnaces roaring, steam-engines hissing, fly wheels revolving,—all the tumults of the Works in full activity, he was prepared. But to find a little kingdom organised within that busy yard,—to find the uncouth man in gaiters ruling it like a First Consul, —above all, to find schools established on the premises, for the hitherto-neglected children of those grimy "hands," and an infirmary for their sick, filled him with respect. If he did not exclaim with the minstrel of Johnny Armstrong,

> What wants this knave
> That a king should have ?

it certainly occurred to him that the husband of Lettice was a more active and intelligent administrator of his domains, than the husband of Rhoda.

He was likely to return to his avenues and

men in livery, with his sense of his own consequence considerably lowered.

On the other hand, by a series of strange coincidences, his Lordship's visit proved to himself singularly injurious. Little as Mark Barneson was gratified by the tardy concession, the yard-porter who noticed the coronet decorating the harness and carriage standing at the gate, (a rare occurrence at the Bracknell Works,) soon circulated a report of the high rank of their visitor. And when it became known among the men that the handsome, well-dressed stranger whose questions evinced such disgraceful ignorance of the mysteries of mechanical power, was a lord,—a law maker, — a game preserver,—a great landed proprietor of the county, — a murmur of evil portent arose in the Yard. It was the moment when the warfare between the agricultural and manufacturing classes, ran highest; when the cry was for cheap bread and cheap beer; when Chartism was

more than a name; and the throne itself supposed, by alarmists, to be in danger.

The workmen of Lambert and Co. were too well paid and cared for, to be ruffians. But in the course of the twenty years that Barneson had been associated with the Bracknell Works, and seen the yard double in extent and the hands treble in numbers, he had become sufficiently weatherwise in its moral atmosphere to know that the angry faces crowding round the sheds and furnaces, wherever they appeared, betokened, if not mischief, discourtesy.

Grieved would he have been had Lord Arden borne away an impression of insubordination and disloyalty in the establishment; and he therefore seized the occasion of emerging into the open air from an engine-house where the normal state of the human blood was fever-heat, and the sound of the human voice inaudible, to make his companion known to the acting overseer by whom they were accompanied:—*not* as a nobleman,—*not* as Lord Arden of Arden

Hall—but as one of the proprietors of the Works, the husband of their old master's daughter.

The words, loudly spoken, were repeated from mouth to mouth, and the effect was instantaneous. Self-interest prevailed. If a proprietor, a master, a partner in the Works, the stranger, no longer an intruder come to watch, espy, and lord it over them with aristocratic pride, might be Cham of Tartary or Sultan of Persia for aught they cared. Nay, a faint attempt at a cheer was made by a few of the most turbulent, when, after shaking hands cordially with Barneson at the gates, the sleeping partner in the firm of Lambert and Co. quitted the Yard.

But this memorable visit, while it afforded to Barneson little more than a topic to be discussed and smiled over, that evening, with his wife and sister, beside their quiet tea-table at Whortle Hill, proved the cause of mortal offence to the junior partner in the firm. It was not till Lord Arden's departure that

Ferrier had been made acquainted, by some babbling clerk, with the name of the individual whose presence was withdrawing the men from their work; and towards whom, a few words from Barneson, had ensured their deference. The slight cheer attempted at his lordship's exit, was wormwood to Alick Ferrier: from bitterness of blood, a radical;—from ambition a Chartist leader;—from disappointed suitorship, a hater of the Ardens.

"This lord,—this profligate representative of six centuries of tyranny and spoliation,—had only to show himself," he said,—in describing that night at his club the scene he had witnessed,—"for Barneson to compel our honest workmen to perform Ko-Tou at his feet;—Barneson, whom Lord Arden had treated from the day of his marriage with every species of contumely;—Barneson, who knew as well as *he* did that Lord Arden's time and fortune were squandered on a mistress, whom he had made a show of quitting, for a few

months, at his marriage, in order to enrich himself with the fine fortune of Rhoda Lambert; and who was now far more his wife than the neglected Countess."

"The mother of mischief," says an Oriental proverb, "is no bigger than a Midge's wing." This scandalous anecdote, related in mere wantonness of spite by the vindictive Ferrier, was caught up by more than one of his democratic friends; not only as an example of aristocratic immorality, but as involving injury to a member of their own class and city. One and all put lance in rest in the cause of Rhoda; who would have regarded them and their championship, as of less account than one of the cinders of their monster ash-heap!

But the seed of the poison-plant thus sown, sprang up and flourished. It was a moment when such mischiefs were at a premium. Personal scandal was the order of the day; and more than one address from the hustings, and half-a-dozen election squibs, contained

highly coloured editions of the story related by Alick Ferrier.

That he regretted having been the means of affixing this stigma on the man by whom he had been supplanted in the possession of a third of Matthew Lambert's splendid property, is not to be supposed. — For the packet enclosing to Lady Arden copies of the handbills and paragraphs in question, which, to a woman of her sensitive temper, conveyed anguish worse than death, was addressed in the well-known hand-writing of Alick Ferrier!—

CHAPTER VII.

It was on rising from a fit of sickness, brought on by the grief and mortification of these discoveries, that Lady Arden paid the visit already described, to Whortle Hill; and great as was the anxiety produced in the mind of the Barnesons by the change in her appearance and wildness of her words, it was fully justified by the state of her health and spirits.

Ungovernable as ever, Rhoda had given

vent to her first indignation by a furious scene with the Earl; and gained nothing by her violence but an extension of the breach between them. Lord Arden denied nothing,—extenuated nothing;—but frankly referred to the tie which made them one, as his "unfortunate marriage." The fault of which he accused himself, was having been tempted, by youth, beauty, and the semblance of excellence, into a hasty match, which had nearly broken the heart of "poor Caroline Gordon;" whom, under the evil influence of Bob Gresham, he had carried off from her family in his Christchurch days, and basely abandoned.

"As I stand before God," said he, "I would never have sought or seen her again after my marriage, but for the miserable home created by your unhappy temper. Tom Littlecote, who adjusted the terms of our separation, can attest, that, for several years, no communication passed between us. But when I found that the alienation between me and

the wife of my choice, was to be permanent,—that my path of life lay before me, barren and blighted,—I could not but recal to mind that I had once been an object of tenderness to a trusting and disinterested heart; and one day,—not thoughtlessly, but deliberately, and to secure myself a quiet refuge,—I returned to poor Caroline. With her and our son has been for years my home, my consolation, my happiness. I do not deny it—I do not defend it. But I have done my best to palliate the wrong by showing you every respect, and granting you every indulgence in my power,—by avoiding all public display of this *liaison*, or any indiscretion wounding to your feelings.—This, you cannot deny."

Nor did she. But her sufferings were not the less acute.

"Intermeddling persons, less humane than myself, seemed to have apprised you of circumstances that you never should or need have known," he continued; "and the cruelty

be on their head! But if you are wise, if you value the happiness of our dear Althy, you will stifle your resentment, and by assumed ignorance of my fault, preserve your own dignity, if not as a wife, as a mother. We are both of the world—worldly. Let its code regulate our conduct. If all ill-used or disappointed persons exposed their secret wounds, and made public moan for their heartaches, society would be unbearable. Either let us part at once and for ever, to the detriment and grief of our child; or, by sacrificing our inclinations to her welfare, agree to make the best of an unfortunate marriage. I engage to resign to your hands the absolute control of your daughter. Leave to *me* the unmolested enjoyment of my life."

By this reasoning was confirmed one of those false positions, which, like a variety of human diseases and distemperatures, are the morbid growth of civilisation. In the plenitude of her pride, Lady Arden recoiled from

appearing before the world in which she played so triumphant a part, in the guise of a rejected wife. The prospects of her daughter were not without some share in the governance of her movements. But what most determined them, was the certainty that, in discussing her "unfortunate marriage," people like Alick Ferrier, and Christina Barneson, would exclaim—"Any one might have known how it would end!" while such traitors as Fleecy, who, it appeared, was quite as much at home in Mrs. Gordon's establishment as at Arden Hall, would simply congratulate her husband on his complete emancipation from the conjugal tie.

She became a reluctant party, therefore, to the treaty of peace proposed. But, as in many another treaty of peace, it was with unabated animosity in her heart.

From that day, commenced a new epoch in her life. Her first introduction to London had not half so much stimulated her faculties.

Then, she was the bride of Rupert; now, she was the bride of Fashion. While poor pretty little Lettice despatched from her happy home many an anxious inquiry after her sister's health, the Countess was beginning to attain, in her own circle, the reputation, hitherto grudgingly accorded, of being a charming woman. She spared no pains to please,—no cost to conquer. By degrees, she created for herself a certain cliency in fashionable life. Presented from the first by her husband's noble connections, it was generally admitted that she did honour to their sanction. The regularity of her features, and her somewhat imperious countenance, were more accordant with the beauty of thirty years of age, than with the softness of girlhood; and artists and ball-room idlers now concurred in pronouncing her one of the handsomest women of the day.

But this did not suffice the craving pretensions of Rhoda. Her beauty was the gift of

Providence ;—her beauty had failed to attach the heart of Rupert ;—and she ambitioned, and attained, the renown of being as agreeable as she was striking. Her *bon-mots* were cited ; her house was one of the pleasantest in town. Lord Arden might repair to his anonymous residence at St. John's Wood for domestic happiness : for pleasure and pastime, the mansion openly assigned him by the Red Book, might have sufficed.

He was beginning, like other middle-aged men whose lives have been a progress from excitement to excitement till sensual enjoyments lose their charm, to take a leading part in public life. The automaton county member of the Lower House, who, for the first dozen years of his parliamentary life had been silently conning his horn-book, noting the mistakes and saturating himself with the theories of the Nestors of Debate, as the richest alluvial soil is sometimes based upon fossils, was continually on his legs in that loftier senate, where, as under

the walls of Jericho, a flourish of trumpets often does the work of a catapult.

"How wonderfully Arden is coming out!" was a very general exclamation,—particularly among those who were equally alive to the merits of his cook, his cellar, and his agreeable Countess. "By the time he attains his hundredth year, the aloe will be in full bloom."

Attached to the party to which has since been assigned, as if in scorn, the name of an eminent political leader, Lord Arden was the firm advocate of every infirm measure. He preached for progress, but the advance must be shuffling and slipshod. His verdict was always that of a French *Juge de Paix*:—"Split the difference!"—Instead of seeing two sides to a question, the shady and the sunny, he beheld truth as a polygon; and selected for his advocacy the angle most expedient.

But by degrees, thanks to heaven, and "the vexatious innovations of the masses," his milk-

and-water of human kindness became a little acidulated. His response to every cry of conscience was now *Cui bono.*—What signified anything? —The current of time would impel the progress of human improvement without human intervention. Civilisation must not be too roughly jogged by the elbow. He had, in short, arrived at the time of life when country-gentlemen declare that popular enlightenment begets arson; and that a horse works best in blinders.

Thus is it with most men. The generous enthusiasm of boyhood, and manhood's philanthropic theories, die down successively, like spring and summer flowers; and when produced from ground so shallow as the mind of a political prig, leave no fertile seed behind.—The legislation of an empire comprising two hundred and twenty-two millions of souls, far exceeds such pithless faculties and shifting principles. And Lord Arden, beginning, like the rest, to find the pressure from with-

out too much for him, was willing to abdicate in favour of Providence.

Wisdom grows with the beard; but it is apt to fall off with the hair. As on the exterior of the human head, the flowing curls of youth gradually subside into meagreness, exposing finally to view a bald and sterile pate, the brain within sheds its ornamental faculties, and becomes nude and practical at last. Scientific barbers attribute this premature baldness to the excessive use of exciting unguents in years of indiscretion. And such is often the origin of the denuded mind.

Certain it is, that while the soul and cranium of Lord Arden were sadly in want of a wig, those of Mark Barneson retained their ambrosial curls in full exuberance.

"One can't help wondering why Arden troubles himself at all about politics," mumbled at the Travellers', old Gresham; who, though no longer on speaking terms with the Earl, spoke *of* him with the familiarity of former

intimacy; as the French nobleman in his red-heeled pumps referred to the Cicero of his schoolboy days, as "*ce cher Marc Tulle.*"—"Arden wants nothing of government; unless he means to make a bishop of Fleecy, or a government-clerk of his Tom Jones."

"A man with such a *chef* as Morin, ought not to spoil his digestion by wrangling about any thing," drawled Beau Brackstone,—one of the professed epicureans of the day. "But poor Litt. bothers himself much less than he used:—strikes like a cuckoo-clock once a quarter, by a got-up speech:—and then becomes dumb as a dormouse, unless at one of his yeomanry dinners,—when starring as Major Sturgeon in the provinces, and returning thanks at his benefit. How different from our Litt., of five and twenty years ago;—insolent,—impertinent,—every thing a young fellow of good family ought to be!"—

"Don't laugh too loud at him, for all that," interposed Harford Clermont, old Gresham's

partner at the whist-table where, between rubber and rubber, Lord Arden's character was thus set up as a target :—" We shall live to see Arden a placeman, either in the cabinet or household.—Should his party ever sidle its way into power, a facile, plausible, *laissez-faire et laissez passer* orator like Arden, who speaks his best when he has nothing to say, would be invaluable. Arden, instead of alarming his auditors like Pilate, by the inquiry of 'What is Truth?' manages to convince them that no such platitude ever existed.—The sophisms of the Ardenian school are sugar to the taste; but I take it to be sugar of lead."

"What matters his morality?" sneered the Beau, in reply. "One goes to his house to listen to—not his prosing,—but the best music in London. That girl of his, to say nothing of his sister and the Roman *Maestra di Capella,* is positively better than any thing out of the *Conservatoire.* No professional voice ever ap-

proaches the pure organ, of which the velvet pile has not been worn off by perpetual solfeggi.—In Mozart or Pergolese, I had rather hear Lady Althea Littlecote than Malibran."

Old Gresham, provoked at finding his partner launch into a subject where he could not follow him, and the discussion of which might remind the rest of the long-standing breach between himself and the Ardens, began to accuse Brackstone of not having finessed his last trump; and one of those disputes ensued which too often convert the green cloth of the whist-table, from a field of the cloth of gold, into a field of battle.

Every body, however, was not as much charmed as Beau Brackstone by the musical fanaticism of Arden House. An *accompagnatrice* like the Signora Letizia, permanently established in the family, imparted too professional a tone to its orchestra.

Above all, the two eighteenth-century maiden aunts of Lord Arden, Lady Lucy and

Lady Leonora Bellasis, who, by their active patronage of his wife at the moment of his *mésalliance*, were entitled to be leading counsel, entered their caveat.

These twin sisters, so alike in grimness of feature and spareness of form, that, "in their cold youth when George the Third was king," no man had ventured to propose to either lest he should seem to commit a species of bigamy,—considered all familiar contact with "people who were paid by the hour to be entertaining," as degrading and injurious.

Lady Lucy,—and her twin sister was but her echo,—was one of whom it might be said, as of Sir Philip Sidney by Sir Henry Wotton, that "her wit was the measure of congruity;" and the informality and slang of modern life, almost reconciled her to the fact that her threescore years and eighteen were wearing to an end.

"It is scarcely decorous, my dear nephew, —scarcely decorous,"—said she, searchingly

regarding Lord Arden over her spectacles, and settling her towy front,—"that a young lady of sixteen, like my grand niece Lady Althea Littlecote, should be on terms of friendship with foreign fiddlers and squallers,—(is it, Leonora?)—We are told that your daughter is a first-rate musician. I had rather she didn't know one note from another, than forget what is due to society from a family like *ours*. (Wouldn't we, Leonora?) Some day, when she elopes with an Italian fellow whose face looks like a horsehair sofa with the stuffing working out, and who has twenty vowels in his name and not a crown piece in his pocket, you'll look very blue, my dear Arden,—you'll look very blue: (won't he, Leonora?)"

Lady Leonora, who for the last threescore years had been acting as a living affirmative to her sister, like the "Yea, forsooth,"—which forms half the responses to King Edward the Sixth's Catechism,—nodded assent.

—"*Very* blue, my dear Lucy,—*ex*ceedingly blue."—

"It was well enough for your step-sister, my dear nephew," resumed her ladyship clearing her throat, "for I'm told that *her* mother was the daughter of a country parson. But in my poor sister Cath'rine's time, when things were managed in a very different style at Arden Hall,—ay, in a *very* different manner (weren't they, Leonora?)"

"*Ex*ceedingly different!" murmured Yea forsooth.—

—"Every year, every season, about March, (if no influenza was prevailing,) Sir Arscott and Lady Cath'rine gave a grand concert in Bruton Street; with Mara one year, Billington another, Grassini a third,—always the singer in vogue —always the singer in vogue: (was'n't there, Leonora?) But though these people cost a mint of money, money was *all* that was paid them. No foolish attentions, none of the court one sees made to such folks now-a-days;

apparently because their conduct's as bad as their larynx is excellent. They were placed in a room apart, as if in quarantine for the yellow fever—as if quarantine for the yellow fever—(weren't they Leonora?")

"Exactly as if in quarantine."—

"Neither my sister Cath'rine nor Sir Arscott, thank goodness, had the smallest taste for music," resumed Lady Lucy. "It is not from them your daughter inherits her crotchets and quavers. But as Handel and Arne were favourite composers at Windsor and Frogmore, my sister always gave us at her concerts, Handel and Arne. None of those indecent die-away Italian Notturni, which Lady Althea and her musical governess pipe up together. Pretty sort of things they must be,—written expressly to be sung in the night time! And sure and certain I am, my dear Arden, that if my sister Cath'rine could put her head out of the grave, and see the only daughter of her only son rigmaroling Italian

lovesongs in company with professors and opera-singers, she'd draw it back again with horror and indignation,—yes, draw it back again with horror and indignation. (Wouldn't she, Leonora?")

Leonora of course assented, nor did her nephew *dis*sent: for he thoroughly appreciated the respectable sentiments and respectable worldly position of his spinster aunts.—But to undertake, as they desired, the reformation of the habits of his house, was out of the question. Reprisals on the part of Lady Arden, might cost him dear. He had engaged to leave in her hands the control of his daughter's education; and must not be the first to attempt a breach of compact. Better that Lady Lucy and her echo should veil their august old faces in a thunder cloud, than provoke reprisals.

But from the earliest times he could remember, when neither his head nor mind was utterly bald,—when he was no sceptic,—no trimmer,—he had reverenced those two stately

maidens as types of the eighteenth century aristocracy,—buckram covered with tiffany,—Dr. Johnson garnished with Debrett;—living the life, if not of the just, of the correct; and wept over, after death, by marble cherubim, designed by Bacon.—In his youth, they were not young. Now, at the close of nearly half a century, they appeared to him sempiternal; and it was like provoking the Destinies themselves, to raise a frown on their parchment brows. Lord Arden knew how proud they were of him; and that their spectacles were never rubbed so clear as to peruse the speeches of the sole nephew of their house and heart. It would break those aged hearts, which, like the Sèvres teacups in their cabinets, had survived so many casualties, if his wife, in some moment of exasperation caused by his breach of agreement with her, should acquaint them that the nephew of whose political standing and high morality they were so proud, had an illegitimate son, about to be

entered at Oxford, and kept a second family-carriage for a wife in all but name:—living in a state of profligacy so respectably organised as to make it trebly offensive.

In *their* time, such things were done in mysterious obscurity; and named in a whisper, with uplifted hands and eyes.—A son of Lord Arden's, bearing his name, yet unentitled to the prefix of Honourable, would have sufficed to efface his own from the heart and will of Lady Lucy Bellasis!—

("Wouldn't it, Leonora?")—

CHAPTER VIII.

"The Countess of Arden,"—sometimes "the beautiful Countess of Arden,"—sometimes "this distinguished leader of the *beau-monde*,"—was now incessantly cited by those morning papers which dedicate a portion of their columns to the chronicling of small-beer, —as giving "a series of fashionable entertainments," or as having "received a small but select circle at the family mansion in Belgrave Square;"—the select circle consisting of some

twenty of the most fastidious of a clique, the least intolerant among whom maintains a Holy inquisition into orthodoxy of birth.

But unlimited indulgence on this point is occasionally accorded to those who are able and willing to provide entertainment for the Ennui perched gaping and famished in the rookery of the great world. Capital music and excellent dinners, backed by the countenance of the ineffable tribe of Bellasis, had done more for Lady Arden than either her beauty or her talents. She was now thoroughly established. No malignment of a Bob Gresham could touch her further. Lady Arden was privileged to snub aspiring Life Guardsmen, and weed from her visiting list over-dressed duchesses,—underbred marchionesses,—and minor ladyships, who, thick as the leaves in Vallombrosa, wanted to overcrowd her rooms. Any remark made *now* upon her origin would have been as much out of place and date, as into the pedigree of the House of Guelph or Hapsburg.

And, contrary to the usual tendencies of human nature, her value for the object attained was increased by possession; for a new horizon was still perceptible from the eminence she had attained. No matter that what she mistook for mountains, were molehills; or that the oaks of her fantastic landscape, were, in reality, whinbushes. *She* saw them through those prismatic glasses which endow everything with the brilliancy of the rainbow. Compelled to close her eyes to the realities of life, to overlook its affections and defy its duties, it was something to be able to fill up the vacuum with a concrete of glittering rubbish:—the glare of assemblies,—the clang of orchestras, — the *staccato-scherzando* of fashionable small talk,—the Dead March in Saul of both their Houses!—She had not served a double term of apprenticeship to such an M.A. of Worldly Arts as Rupert Earl of Arden, without imbibing some portion of his tact. No one knew better how to assort her company,

or add to her acquaintance any desirable novelty of the season. The young mover of the address in Lords or Commons,—the writer of the last crack article in the Quarterly, or latest political squib, — was as sure of a place at the Arden banquets, as strawberries in March, or green peas in April. But novelty was only one of the qualifications needful. Early in her married life, Lady Arden had enlisted in her cliency the half-dozen supreme elderlies,—incomparable both as sayers and listeners,—the conscript fathers of White's or Brookes's, whose presence imparts as authentic a *cachet* to a clique, as its coronet, claret, or dry champagne.

One or two of these accomplished mummies, for the conservation of each of whom, as for that of the Pharaohs, a couple of thousand pounds' worth of spices had been expended, was sure to occupy the best place at Lord Arden's table. For as Tasso asserts, in Goethe's play, that

Genius requireth hospitality

by rendering immortal its entertainers, men like Beau Brackstone and Harford Clermont were as able by a by-word at the club to bring Lady Arden and her fêtes into fashion, as the sword of Queen Anne to convert her staymaker into a knight.

It was amusing to see the old creatures warm up under her smiles, like Chelsea veterans or Greenwich pensioners under a sunny wall; prosing or tattling complacently of the old days of Carlton House and Oaklands, or the Melton or Pytchley Clubs, which have now lapsed into ancient history; just as the one-armed soldier or one-legged ancient mariner, recounts his obsolete heroism of Assaye or Aboukir.

Beau Brackstone sometimes wondered how she could stand "that bore old Clermont, who could talk of nothing but the turf;" while Clermont was equally surprised that she could endure a *rossignol* like Beau Brackstone, who

looked like a thrice-cleaned kid glove, or the ghost of a perfumer. But sooner would she have ostracised even the farthingales of the Ladies Bellasis from Arden House, than any of these tellers of the clubs: whose presence absolved her from the imputation of plebeianism, as surely as a lightning conductor secures a powder magazine from the electric fluid.

Even, however, the well-certificated excellence of her position, did not divert her attention from her main object; to secure an early establishment for her daughter in honourable wedlock. Shaken in health by the nervous excitement which, for years, had preyed on her constitution, she foresaw that, at her death, the Countesship of Arden would devolve upon St. John's Wood, as surely as if the hated name of Caroline Gordon were inserted in Burke's Peerage as her heiress presumptive; and Althy, her darling Althy, must not abide the chance of such a contingency.

On her return to Arden Hall at the close of the season, instead of depositing Lady Althea with Lady Littlecote at the Manor House during her periodical visits to Whortle Hill, she forestalled her daughter's entreaties for permission to bear her company; and seemed to take the utmost pleasure in witnessing her enjoyment of the society of her cousin, and Mark Barneson's honest smiles, when he heard their voices mingle in a duet, or saw them light of foot as fawns, chasing each other through the shrubberies. Some day or other, Mark might have to defend the interests of that dear Althy!—Better, therefore, that he should cease to regard her as daughter to the Earl of Arden, and learn to love her as the cousin of his darling Barbara.

But alas! a year or two after Lady Arden's accession, if not to the throne of fashion at least to a prominent position on the footsteps of the dais, a melancholy apprehension enhanced the interest of her visits to Whortle Hill.

Just as she was leaving town, at that dreary moment when the verdure of the parks and squares becomes sered with yellow, and the shuttered windows of family-mansions announce the departure of their inhabitants, when shops shed their bills and the Mall its leaves, and all the failures and follies of the season start forth like the ghosts that assailed Ulysses, a letter was placed in her hands, indited in the harsh-looking perpendicular hand-writing, which, in her girlhood, used to affix the words "good," or "careless," to her exercises.

A letter from Christina Barneson was not an agreeable event. But she was far from anticipating how painful would prove its intelligence.

It began with stating that the writer was under the necessity of quitting Whortle Hill for some months,—perhaps for more.—Her aged mother, who had been gradually falling into childishness, was now too feeble to fulfil

even the slight duties of her office; yet though long rendered independent of its salary by the liberality of her children, the poor old lady would not hear of resigning. For more than twenty years, the groined chambers and gloomy corridors of St. Margaret's had been her home. She could grope about blindfold in the ground-floor so suitable to her infirmities, and there she chose to die. It was her Zoar; — the City of Refuge in which she had found shelter in her destitute widowhood. To compel her to leave it, when her days were numbered, would have been cruel.

The only alternative was that Chrissy, the least bespoken of her daughters, should come and watch over her and St. Margaret's: officiating in her place, and pacifying her peevish repinings. Mrs. Knowles was with her husband, now a Colonel and D.A.G. in India. The widowed Nancy had a large family of children clinging to her skirts; and the pro-

prietor of the Bishopstoke villa would not hear of ceding his dressy, flashy wife for the ignoble purpose of being useful.—It was clear that the spinster at the Bracknell Works must be the victim.

"Had it been at any other moment, dear Lady Arden," wrote Chrissy, "I should have fulfilled this duty cheerfully. But alas! for some months past, I have been most anxious about our dear Lettice. When you were here last Autumn, you noticed her languor. The cough with which she was then affected, lasted through the winter; and even in summer, and at Whortle Hill, it has not diminished. Though she sometimes writes to you, it is probable that you know nothing of all this; for even to us, her inmates, she never alludes to her health. Partly to satisfy her, partly because we have not courage to face the possibility of her danger, *we* also abstain, as far as possible, from the subject. But how blind to ourselves to the fact that her sweet face becomes

every day more hectic, her dear frame more feeble !—

"Now that I am compelled to leave her, I see this more clearly. I see also that Barbara, young as she is, scarcely sixteen, is not to be trusted either with the responsibility of watching over her, or the great, great grief with which she is threatened.

"Mr. Brathwaite, who, though old and infirm, is still the first consulting physician here, has pronounced that my sister-in-law ought to pass the winter in a milder climate. But she will not hear of it. Mark, she says, must not be taken from his business, or *she* be taken from Mark. The truth is, dear Lady Arden, that the first and last visit of any member of her family to the continent is so connected with the grievous end of your poor brother Zack, that she cannot endure the project.

"What I earnestly desire is that, on your return to Arden, you will hasten to her, and endeavour to persuade her to neglect no means

of preserving her valuable life. My own feelings on the subject are too strong for entering upon them more fully; and I will, therefore, only subscribe myself

"Your old and faithful friend,

"CHRISTINA B."

A terrible letter!—It seemed to bring the toll of a knell to the ear of Lady Arden! The allusion, too, to her brother, from whose memory she always recoiled as from the touch of a serpent, curdled her blood.

Instantly hurrying from London, she was soon at Whortle Hill. It seemed as if she could not reach fast enough that dear sister of whose lifetime she had made so little, and who was now, perhaps, about to leave her for ever.

But her anticipations of evil were far surpassed. She had selected an unlucky moment for the interview. That morning, Christina, again summoned to W., had quitted

Whortle Hill; and the gentle invalid, though at parting from one whom she regarded with filial respect as well as sisterly fondness, she had placed the utmost constraint on her emotions, could not but feel, when she was gone, that the parting was final;—that they should meet no more on this side the grave.

No wonder, therefore, that when the real sister, so much less a sister than the thoughtful Chrissy, made her appearance, Lady Arden should find the voice of poor pretty little Lettice scarcely audible, her cheeks tear-stained, and a spasmodic cough racking her emaciated frame. Barbara, as pale as death, was keeping watch beside her sofa.— Her husband, without fortitude to witness her sufferings, was pacing the garden, entrusting her in secret prayer to a stronger safeguard than his own.

Lady Arden was deeply touched. Her sagacious eye was not to be blinded to the

reality of the danger. For any benefit from a milder climate, it was clearly too late.

Without hesitation she resolved to establish herself for the present at Whortle Hill. Althy was safe and happy with aunt Helen and Lady Littlecote; and it was easy to send back the carriage with a note of explanation to the Earl. The difficulty was to make the proposal with sufficient deference to the feelings of Mark, and without alarming his wife.

So seldom, from her very childhood, had he seen tears fall from the eyes of Rhoda, that when she sorrowfully, almost humbly, entreated permission to be allowed to attend upon her sister, he was not only touched, but awed. It seemed as if danger must be indeed among them,—that the case must be hopeless,—since even Lady Arden was thus changed. He could not thank her.—He did not even assent —But having wrung her hand in silence, rushed from the room to struggle in silence with his despair.

Two years before, on the discovery of Rupert's utter alienation, Lady Arden had herself undergone a severe illness; and, at the time, considered the attentions she received from every member of the Arden family and household, as of the most exemplary kind. Althy, Helen Littlecote, the dowager, — even the Earl himself,—had united in assiduous kindness: their periodical visits to her room, and morning and evening enquiries, as regular as the rising and setting of the sun. The finest flowers and fruits of the garden were placed by her bedside; the blinds were carefully raised or lowered as daylight waned or dawned. All the forms and ceremonies of a sick room, were methodically executed.

She was satisfied. Her nature was not tender enough to perceive that tenderness was wanting. Its limited sympathies were responded to.—She understood not the existence of warmer love.

But now that she saw the eye of Barbara

watching every glance and movement of her mother, scarcely daring to breathe when she slept, scarcely bearing to live when she suffered,—now that she saw poor Mark stealing in and out like a shadow from the adjacent chamber, because he could not trust himself to contemplate the altered features of his wife,—now that she found the very servants overlooking all difference of night and day, and ever on the watch lest some want of their poor dear mistress should be a moment unsatisfied,—now that she beheld the poor, huddled in silence at the gate, not venturing to enquire after their benefactress, but endeavouring to form auguries of any change in her state from the aspect of the house,—she began to feel what it is to be loved and honoured.—Above all, *to be loved!*—

She did not avow quite so much in the letter she addressed to Christina, at St. Margaret's; with a detailed account of the progress of the invalid, and her own dark prog-

nostications. But she wrote with unstudied sincerity that an angel was passing from among them; and that her only consolation in a moment so heartrending, was to see and know how fondly her qualities had been appreciated, and how great had been her happiness on earth.

Her own coronet, or her sister's humble crown of heartsease,—which was the richer possession?—The dying woman at Whortle Hill was undisturbed by fears of an unworthy successor. No Caroline Gordon would replace her sacred guardianship over *her* girl. The manly grief of her husband, the pious anguish of her children, diffused, like incense, a sacred atmosphere, to soothe her parting soul. And when in her last moments, she conjoined by a touch of her cold, thin hand, the hands of those so dear to her, with a whispered prayer to her husband to make the two about to become motherless, the first objects of his life, Lady Arden felt that his

scarcely audible promise was registered in Heaven.

The first proof he gave of his consciousness of the obligation, was by a refusal, when all was over, to allow Barbara and her brother to accompany their aunt on her return to Arden Hall. She fancied that to remain at Whortle Hill after they had buried their dead, would be too searching a trial for their young hearts. Neither her persuasions, nor Lord Arden's, sufficed however to induce poor Mark to submit to a change of scene; and he chose that his children,—*her* children,—should remain with him. Together, they would visit her grave; together, meditate over her virtues;—together yearn after her silent voice,—her lost, lost love!—

It would be a breach of faith to her who was gone, if he parted from them at such a moment: or allowed their wounded hearts to encounter an atmosphere so perilous as that of Arden Hall.

CHAPTER IX.

Towards the close of Lettice Barneson's blameless life, her husband one day expressed his surprise to Lady Arden that Lady Althea did not drive to Whortle Hill for a glimpse of her mother, and a last interview with her dying aunt. He seemed to think that the blessing of that kindly being would be a blessing indeed: that the departing angel would shed balm from her wings.

The seeming coldness of Rhoda in refuting

the suggestion, arose from fear that Althy's nature was deficient in the tenderness that sympathises with a sick room, and refines the nature of the living into fit companionship for the soul about to put on immortality.—She dreaded to assure herself on this point. She was afraid of sounding the rock, or probing the sand, in search of living waters; lest peradventure all should prove dry and barren. For Althea was to *her* as the spring in the desart. If disappointed in *her*, her future life was a blank.

But to conceal the nature of her maternal fears, she rashly attributed her unwillingness that her daughter should visit Whortle Hill, to fear of infection. "Many people,—many distinguished medical men,—considered consumption catching. She trusted Mark would excuse her for not endangering the health of her shorn lamb."—

Now poor Mark also possessed his own shorn lamb; and sharp was the thorn that

aggravated his anguish throughout those miserable days, those sleepless nights, in terror lest he should be doomed to a double bereavement! His loving girl, his sweet gentle Barbara, hanging continually over her mother to imbibe from her yearning looks, now that her voice was grown too feeble to be heard, the expression of some passing wish, might be imbibing also the seeds of fatal disease. And yet, he could not check her,—could not apprise her of danger,—could not interpose between those two beloved beings.—Contending affections seemed to tear his very soul asunder.

And when poor pretty little Lettice was gone for ever,—when her flesh became marble, and her loving looks were veiled in darkness, came the dreadful surmise that worse was to follow. To borrow a few more lines from the lyric already cited as illustrative of her nature,

She died, ere love was fully told
  As dies a flower in spring;
Earth never lost and Heaven ne'er gained,
  A fairer sweeter thing.
And hundreds like her live and die
  In England's household bowers.
And blessed are the hearts that say,
  "Such angels still are ours!"

And the angel still his own, was perhaps, about to be taken from him!—Oh! misery—misery!—

It might have touched the most obdurate nature,—even the tough heart of Alick Ferrier,—to have seen the poor widower watching every change of countenance in his ailing child. The rugged oak had become as a willow. Every moan, every slight cough of Barbara's seemed to shake his very soul, and bow him for the first time to earth. The deep mourning worn by his daughter, imparted by its severe contrast unusual paleness to her face: and the languor of dejection was easily attributable to the weakness of disease.

Old Brathwaite, who though retired from

his professional labours, was coaxed to Whortle Hill for a day or two, to give his unsuspected attention to the grandchild of his old friend Matthew Lambert, a little impaired in judgment by over-ripeness of years, confirmed in the daughter's case the verdict he had pronounced in that of the mother. "The atmosphere of Birmingham would be highly injurious to her delicate lungs. Instead of spending the winter at the Bracknell Works, or even at Whortle Hill, she must be taken to a southern climate."

Where would he not have taken her for safety or for succour? She looked so like her mother,—that mother whose nature had been the incarnation of a smile; that mother who had dismembered her young frame and marred her comfort for life, by a rash attempt to obtain a last glimpse of him,—*him*, uncouth and unlovely, and yet the object of her girlish love!—

But how was he to make so vast an effort

as that journey safe and acceptable to her, without warning her of the precariousness of her health?

Urged by this poignant anxiety, he did what he had hundreds of times determined never to do,—he hastened to Arden Hall.

Under the administration of its present owners, the venerable mansion had assumed a still more dignified aspect. The house, though restored and beautified, retained every feature of the original structure; and the timber, judiciously thinned, did credit to fifteen years of expansion. The establishment was perfect. Lady Arden, formed for government, maintained strict regularity; and of whatever else the Earl might complain, a "well-ordered home, man's chief delight," was admirably provided for him.

But of all these things, Mark Barneson saw no more than if he had been travelling from Dan to Beersheba. The courtyard might have been overgrown with thistles,—the sable-suits

worn in memory of his poor wife, might have been the flaunting mediæval livery of the house of Littlecote, for anything he knew or cared. Ushered into the morning-room of his sister-in-law, he went straight to the point,—told his unhappy story,—demanded her counsel and assistance,—then covered his face with his hands, and wept bitterly.

"What was he to do?—Edward was about to be matriculated at Oxford, and scarcely of an age to be left homeless during his vacation. The business of the Bracknell Works, now one of the most considerable in Birmingham, and of necessity much neglected by him during his late affliction, demanded the supervision of the master, to modify the ruinous abuses which had crept in. Still, if Lady Arden thought, if Rhoda thought, that Brathwaite was justified in his opinion, he would abandon all, and give up time, business, son, everything, to restore health to his little Barbara!"—

Lady Arden did not think,—*Rhoda* did not

think.—For once, she *felt*,—and acted at the instigation of her feelings. She would proceed to Nice, accompanied by her daughter and his own, for the winter months, with the Signora Letizia by way of interpreter to the party.

In Helen and Lady Littlecote, (the impaired health of the latter of whom forbad her to quit Arden,) the Earl would find constant companions.—His household comforts would be cared for. *Her* place was with her sister's suffering girl. "Next to Althy," she said,—and for once, as she spoke, she did not endeavour to repress her tears,—"next to Althy, the being dearest to her on earth, was Barbara!"—

Her voice would, perhaps, have failed her, as well as her habitual stoicism, had she attempted to relate how, on her death-day, her sister had turned her poor thin face towards her, while Barbara lay half senseless on her pillow, to murmur—"Love her, Rhoda, when I am gone. Love her for my sake. Give her all the affection you owe me.—For I have loved

you dearly.—Love her, Rhoda, when I am gone!"—

But the full force of the obligation was not the less deeply impressed upon her mind. Lord Arden's consent was, in consequence of the compact long subsisting between them, unhesitatingly given; and, the day for departure fixed, Barneson felt inclined to kneel down before her to express his thanks. He little dreamed how slight a sacrifice of domestic happiness she was about to make; or that the ready sanction afforded by Lord Arden, implied indecent satisfaction at securing the command of his time. The Countess, at Nice, was a far more acceptable wife, than the Countess seated gloomy and stately by his fireside. As regarded his daughter, he had resigned to her mother all control over her; and "fresh scenes and pastures new," would be more advantageous to Lady Althea, than a dreary winter of family mourning at Arden Hall.

The only person who evinced the least re-

luctance on the occasion, was Barbara. The malady which physicians and anxious friends believed to be purely physical, was, in truth, only the effect of heavy affliction on a heart that tasted for the first time of sorrow: and all she desired was to remain at Whortle Hill, —in those quiet rooms where the voice of her angelic mother still seemed to linger. To haunt, day after day, every spot rendered sacred by the memory of the dead, to visit the grave where she was lying, which, if unadorned by weeping cherubim, was bathed by human tears,—to whisper "mother,—mother," and even madly, fondly expect a whispered word of tenderness in return,—was all she wanted—all that was required for her perfect restoration. And to quit the place where these memories abided, to lose the sympathising pressure of her father's hand, to go where dear Edward was no longer to be seen, and written to only at intervals, was almost more than she could bear.

But Barbara was not accustomed to rebel against parental authority; and having vainly pleaded for a change of plans, she succeeded only in persuading her father, who was to have taken leave of her in London, to accompany the party as far as Dover.

A few years before, and such a proposal would have been highly distasteful to the Countess of Arden. But the now softened Rhoda was pleased with whatever gratified the invalid; and Lady Althea, whose heart Mark Barneson had bespoken, three years before, by his gift of prize auriculas, warmly seconded the scheme.—The Signora Letizia, who was seated opposite to him in the railway carriage, slightly shrugged her shoulders, indeed, at the large-knuckled, bony hand, perceptible through his black gloves; and at the tears occasionally moistening his high cheek-bones, so different from the contour of Lord Arden's Grecian face, and well-combed whiskers. But even her contempt for a man to whom continental lan-

guages were unknown tongues, was completely subdued by the announcement gossiped by the lady's maid, that this uncouth brother-in-law of my lady was in possession of revenues exceeding those of an Italian prince; and that the number of workmen in his employ could easily bowl over a Modenese Contingent.

Meanwhile, of the two brothers-in-law whose firesides the departure of the Dover packet of that day had rendered lonely, Lord Arden experienced the relief of a convict suddenly unchained; roaming cheerfully through the deserted saloons which, with Rhoda seated there, always chilled him to the soul: and feeling as if the closet that held the skeleton was double-locked for a time. Whereas Mark, *poor* Mark, returned to the Bracknell Works,—(he had not courage for Whortle Hill,—he would fain have never entered the house again,)—as resolute to deaden the sense of sorrow by collision with careless ledgers, faulty machinery, and recalcitrant hands, as

Byron to "break his mind" against the rugosities of an Armenian grammar.

It was almost a relief when, on the night of his return home, Alick Ferrier beset him with evil tidings of the failure of a Sir Drewry Hart, a railway contractor of some eminence, by which the firm of Lambert and Co. must sustain a heavy loss.

The junior partner, by whom the transaction with the defaulter was concluded without the sanction of Barneson, had prepared himself for an outburst of indignation. But to his surprise, poor Mark observed only that "Sir Drewry had been swimming out of his depth, and that he expected no better of him." And both parties congratulated themselves that, as a collateral security for their claim, they held a mortgage upon his estates in Sussex, where the bankrupt had been creating a garden of Eden for the benefit of his creditors.

After his recent bereavement, and under his present anxiety, money difficulties of any

kind, seemed to Mark of secondary importance. Of the three beloved ones for whom, for the last eighteen years, he had been toiling, the dearest was beyond reach of this world's cares or enjoyments; and another, foredoomed to the skies.—It was only Edward and himself who would have to suffer; and Edward and himself would bravely bear their burthen.

Weary and disconsolate, he retired to brood on his sleepless pillow over his losses: —not of silver or gold;—not of bonds or debentures;—but of those who had left in his desolate heart, a vacuum never to be filled up.

CHAPTER X.

Next morning, he had to do what had rarely occurred to him,—to ask indulgence of Alick Ferrier. An early hour had been mutually appointed for going over the Bracknell accounts; and Barneson had impressed upon his partner the preceding evening, that having no domestic ties upon his time, he should give himself up entirely to business.

Yet already, Barneson's portmanteau was packed for departure from home! "He was

about to start for Yorkshire on urgent private affairs. He should be a week away. Ferrier must again undertake the whole charge of the Works."

Ferrier had not the slightest objection. He regretted only that the duty was not permanent. But on booking the address afforded him by his partner for the transmission of letters, he felt a little curious concerning the motives of so sudden a journey. There could be little doubt that he had been summoned by the post. But from whom was the letter, what did it contain?

Tidings that could scarcely have surprised the canny Scotchman, more than they had startled the unsophisticated heart of Barneson!—The widow of his uncle, Mark Holden, was no more; having atoned by twenty years of misery for the folly of her second marriage, and her ingratitude towards her first husband. On finding her end approaching, the repentant woman had called in the

consolations of the Church and malice of the Law; and confided to their united administrants a codicil to the will of her first husband, drawn up by himself; and suppressed, at his decease, at the instigation of her second. By this instrument was bequeathed to his "nephew and godson Mark, second son of Edward Barneson, Esq., the reversion of the house and stock of Ryecroft Farm; together with certain canal shares and other securities, to the value of about £35,000; the interest of which, his widow was to enjoy only for the term of her natural life."

By the lawyer thus confided in, a will was instantly drawn up, appointing as her sole executor the heir to the property. The old lady had died childless; and the delinquent, from whom she had been long separated, though entitled to usurp her income, could make out no title to her estate. Nor dared he dispute the authenticity of the document which she had surreptitiously pre-

served : any law proceedings concerning which, would bring his villainy to light.

The first exclamation of Mark Barneson, at this unexpected accession of fortune, was, that it came too late! "A fortieth part of it might have saved the life and credit of his father;" and preserved his earlier days from the insults of Zack, and scorn of Rhoda Lambert. But he had now worked his way to independence. He was affluent; and to those for whose sake affluence had been welcome, all worldly treasure was as dross.—

He arrived at York, where for many years the quondam Mrs. Holden had been residing in penurious obscurity, in time to lay her head respectably in the grave; and on examining her papers, found many letters addressed to himself; by which it appeared that she had long meditated confession, and been withheld by fear of worldly exposure. — Conscious that, till her death, he had no valid claim on the property, she seemed to have

resolved on deferring, to the last moment, an avowal which involved in disgrace no less her own name, than that of the husband she abhorred.

The two wills, or rather the new will and old codicil, were proved at York; though not without technical difficulties and much attestation. — No opposition, however, was offered by the husband of the deceased; and the opulent manufacturer took possession unmoved, of what, by the disinherited gawky youth stranded in the old parlour at W., would have been accounted the wealth of Peru.

Right glad, however, was his honest heart that he had never for a moment spoken unkindly of the memory of his uncle.—He even rebuked himself for having so thoroughly dismissed from his mind the widow who had done him such tardy justice. But her harshness in withholding the small legacy so important to his family, and still more, her second marriage,

had disgusted him. Yet he now reflected with regret that, had he once inquired after her welfare, he might have relieved the wants of one who had been dear to his uncle.

The family estate at Ryecroft was let, it appeared, for a long term of years. But it was essential that the probate of the codicil and will should be exhibited to the tenant. Even lacking that necessity, however, Mark would not have quitted Yorkshire without a glimpse of the scene of his happy boyhood.

And when thus visited, how old it made him feel,—and yet how young!—Though the outbuildings had been reconstructed, to meet the whims and fancies of modern agriculture, the house remained nearly unchanged;—warm, dry, commodious, unsightly,—but abounding in pleasant reminiscences. The old elm-trees, where he had birdsnested, were a little staghorned, and the fish ponds, into which he had thrown his first line, were a trifle weedy. But the purple line

of hills skirting the horizon,—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,—seemed to look at him familiarly from afar, with the face of a friend!—

Old uncle Mark was hand-in-hand with him as he walked; and once more, he taxed himself with ingratitude for having suffered so many years to elapse, without revisiting the spot. But what day in the interim had he been able to call his own?—When could he have absented himself, for his selfish gratification, from the dear sedentary wife so dependent on his care?—What time had the representative of Lambert and Co. to saunter in bean-fields or lounge in Yorkshire lanes, only because he had loved them as a boy?—

During the ten days of his compulsory absence from home, two letters from Barbara were forwarded to him; speaking cheerfully of her health, and courageously of their separation. But an accompanying one from Lady Arden was far less satisfactory. Her

niece had been so seriously indisposed at Paris that she had called in medical aid; and was advised to proceed, without a day's delay, on their journey South. She was to write again from Lyons.

From Ferrier, too, his business-news was of a cheering complexion. The title-deeds of Sir Drewry Hart's estate of Heronhurst, proved to have been validly assigned to them. They were in a position to dispose of the property, at once, should an advantageous tender be made. A day or two afterwards, Ferrier enclosed to him a printed handbill, descriptive of the estate; drawn up in the florid arabesque style of a fashionable auctioneer.

"Situated on a gravelly soil in one of the loveliest nooks of the salubrious county of Sussex; within a few miles of the Southern Coast, and affording, under the domestic shelter of our own South Downs, a Happy Valley, rivalling the climate of Montpellier and the amenities of Tempe."

On the running stream that beautified the grounds,—on the noble conservatory that adorned the admirably arranged mansion,—Barneson dwelt not at all. — The winter-garden of evergreens, the forcing houses, the magnificent hall, the suite of spacious reception rooms, scarcely moved his interest.—But this English "Tempe," this house "in a soft southern atmosphere," was attractive indeed to one who had vowed as earnestly as ever Rhoda Lambert did of yore, that never again should his delicate Barbara set foot in the Bracknell Works.

Whortle Hill faced the North. Whortle Hill was situated on an exposed eminence. No end of the faults he was beginning to espy in a residence where his darling child, if restored to him, would probably not enjoy a day of health or happiness. The spot was too replete with melancholy associations. Better for them both to bid adieu to Whortle Hill. The place might be easily disposed of. A

villa universally cited as the pleasantest in the neighbourhood of Birmingham, would realise its full value. And what a gratification, on the return of his precious Barbara to England, to instal her at once in a new and cheerful home; where her infirm health would be soothed by the Southern breezes, and her spirit cheered by a new aspect of nature!—

That it was situated nearly two hundred miles from his business, was comparatively unimportant. — Railroads would reconcile all difficulties of time and place;—and now that Ferrier had shown himself thoroughly worthy of confidence, and that Ned would, in a year or two, take an active part in the concern, a day or two in every week might certainly be spared to his daughter,—his home,—his happiness.

Such was the unquiet vision of one little accustomed to dream dreams. But his mind

had been shaken of late by the influence of severe affliction; and the moment he allowed a ray of sunshine to penetrate the gloom, it poured in with a light too dazzling.

Instead of returning straight to Birmingham, he resolved to visit Heronhurst and settle the question. The season was unfavourable; November, with its brief daylight and misty atmosphere. But if the place looked or felt Montpellierish at that untempting season, what would the spring afford in accomplishment of his wishes?—

But in most countries November, like the toad, "wears a precious jewel in its head;" and when Barneson and his fly entered the lodge-gates of Heronhurst, the soft effulgence of the *été de St. Martin*,—the Martinmas summer,—was irradiating the landscape and eliciting the musky odours of the groves. The oaks retained their foliage. The scarlet leaves of the beech and maple still lingered on the bough. After the sweeping breezes and pro-

nounced features of the noble old county he had just quitted, those Sussex valleys appeared almost a garden.

The woman who showed him the house assured him that such weather, so far from being unseasonable, was the normal state of the winter atmosphere at Heronhurst. "Snow seldom fell there, and never lay; and the camellias trained against the house were never matted against frost!" The tall magnolias, almost amounting to forest trees, that graced the lawn, afforded, however, far surer testimony to the mildness of the climate than her over-protested asseverations.

Barneson had not spent an hour on the spot, before he believed in his soul that the opportunity thus afforded him to secure a haven of refuge for his Barbara, in connection with the miraculous restoration of Mark Holden's fortune, argued the especial intervention of Providence. — In the thankfulness of his heart, the poor widower remembered that

there was now an angel in heaven, watching over the welfare of his child !—

It would have amused a person less lenient in his appreciation of the motives of his fellow creatures than Barneson, to watch the countenance of Ferrier, when, on the evening of his return to Birmingham, he acquainted him with his intention to appropriate to himself, at the price at which it had been mortgaged to the firm, the estate of Heronhurst. Ignorant, at present, of his partner's recent accession of fortune, he was displeased that the expected sum of twelve thousand pounds should be withdrawn, or rather withheld, from the Bracknell Works: and when Mark, to pacify his uneasiness, informed him that no part of his investment in the business would be required to meet the re-imbursement, he peevishly remarked that "according to *his* notions, Whortle Hill would not sell for half the amount."

But when Barneson fixed an early day for

the re-imbursement of the funds, Ferrier began to appreciate the authority he should personally derive from the frequent absences of his chief; and in announcing to his wife that they might soon look to obtain possession of what, though its complexion little justified the name, was still called the New House, he merely added with a sneer that Barneson was about to play the gentleman at large,—and "much good might it do him!"—

Except for the Ferriers, the question of Barneson's immigration had little interest. The idle rich of Birmingham had long voted him unsocial,—the industrious poor were too busy to trouble their heads about him; and when it was known that the house and furniture of Whortle Hill were disposed of by private contract to a newly-married couple who, if only half so wealthy, were twice as ostentatious, they became wholly indifferent in what part of the United Kingdom the disconsolate widower intended to establish himself.

That his daughter was already on the continent, under the care of the Countess of Arden, was a fact that seemed to divorce the Barnesons from their fellow-citizens, and assign to Mr. and Mrs. Ferrier the local representation of Lambert and Co.

No sooner were the deeds executed which rendered him master of the estate, than he set about, in right earnest, the completion and furnishing of the house. The sum realised by the sale of Whortle Hill doubled his expectations; for, with the exception of a few objects endeared by fond associations, he reserved nothing. Every thing destined to meet the eye of Barbara in her new abode, must be fresh and cheering;—every thing a surprise. Not a syllable had he written either to her or his son, touching his projected change of residence; confiding it only to Christina, to whom he paid a visit at St. Margaret's, after leaving Heronhurst. To *her*, unspeakable was the relief to find

that on the death of her infirm parent, she was to return no more to the Bracknell Works; the scene of the disappointments of her youth, as well as of the vexations of her middle age, from Mrs. Alick Ferrier's officious interference in the schools and infirmary over which, for so many years, she had domineered unmolested.

While the ready aid which ready money always secures, was converting Heronhurst into the paradise described by Jones, the rhetorical auctioneer, — while able upholsterers were rendering it a comfortable abode, and tasteful decorators a delightful one,—Barbara, unconscious how many new pleasures awaited her in England, was enjoying, at Nice, the advantages prognosticated from change of climate.

The delicate girl was gradually expanding, like a flower in the sunshine. The dear aunt Arden, fondly cherished by association with her mother's deathbed, was all in all to her;

and Althy, who, though but a year her senior, was oldened by London experience, assumed towards her a tone of protection that fortified their mutual love. Even the stately Letizia unbent to assist in raising and sustaining the drooping flower, whose indisposition was the cause of her hearing once again the accents of her native country.

Together, they enjoyed the blue skies and purple seas of the Mediterranean; and the green lawns, and fertile gardens, that reminded them that they were approaching the sun.

Occasionally, a letter from the fondest of fathers, completed the happiness of Barbara:—occasionally, a few lines addressed by Lord Arden to Althy, afforded them acceptable tidings of Warwickshire. That *neither* father told *all* to his daughter, was unsuspected by the girls; and each was diligently turning to account the opportunities afforded by their foreign sojourn, to perfect those superficial

accomplishments which England esteems so highly, yet never attempts to render indigenous.

At length, however, arrived a letter, of which the contents were less welcome to one of the party. Helen Littlecote announced to Lady Arden, in a tone evidently rather desponding than exultant, that she had consented to change her condition without changing her name. After fourteen years of reiterated refusals, she was about to become the wife of Fleecy; who, resigning his living of Mattingley to some other Mr. Littlecote, was to reside with her mother at the Manor. At eight and thirty, Helen seemed of opinion that, since no longer the slave of fancy, it was better to become the ally of expediency. If the reverend Thomas were destined to be the future Earl of Arden, better that Arden Hall should be her eventual home, and the family dignity and property be represented by a true-born Littlecote.

Lady Arden, instinctively mistrustful, could not help suspecting that her husband had profited by her absence to exercise undue influence over the mind of his sister. Aware of her contempt for the reverend timeserver, he had probably used such arguments concerning Helen's unprotected situation in the event of his own and her mother's death, as, had Rhoda been on the spot, she would have easily overthrown. He, perhaps, wanted to secure in the future Earl and Countess of Arden, a protector for the son who should never have been born.

The conjecture rendered the projected marriage doubly vexatious. But it was too late for interference. Ere her answer to the letter of announcement could reach the Manor House, Helen would be a wife.

Alas! the apprehension that Althy, should she, by necessity or inclination, remain unmarried, might have to accept shelter in a

home of which Fleecy was dictator, and the illegitimate son of her husband an inmate, made her affix double value to the friendship of Barneson and the sources of fortune over which he presided.

CHAPTER XI.

The winter of which the bereaved husband and solitary father had expected to count the minutes, sped like a dream. His hands were full of business. Several important contracts were in process of execution at the Bracknell Works; and the sale of Whortle Hill and realisation of the Holden inheritance, afforded ample occupation for his time. But in addition to all this, periodical visits to supervise

the improvements of his Sussex estate could not be dispensed with.

No king in a fairy tale, intent upon building up a tower of steel or palace of adamant for the preservation of a beloved child menaced by the malice of an enchanter, ever devoted himself more earnestly to the magic task than Mark to the completion of Heronhurst. Rooms with a southern aspect were selected for his daughter. Double casements were affixed to every window looking northwards; and all was so arranged that, if condemned to keep house during the winter months, as was the case with her poor mother, she might enjoy a free range of corridors for exercise, with an Italian climate of their own. But independent of the delight he took in these preparations, he was intensely pleased with his new possessions.

Our Teutonic ancestors assigned the name of Earth-hunger to the appetite for landed property peculiar to their race; and Heron

hurst was the first morsel of land by which Barneson had appeased the propensity. Whortle Hill, the choice and purchase of the Lamberts, had never seemed his own. But this beautiful spot, bought with money inherited from his family, and destined to form an abiding place for *his* race as much as Arden Hall for the Littlecotes,—remote from the humiliating associations of W., and sad ones of Birmingham,—was as great a favourite with him as Versailles with the Grand Monarque, or the Brighton Pavilion with a sovereign of somewhat minor account.

Reserved as he was in family matters, nothing definite had transpired touching the amount of his northern heritage; and the exaggerations usual on such occasions, had taken wind. Some said he had come into ten thousand a year, and was about to dispose of his share in the Bracknell Works. Others spoke of £100,000 in ready money, which he

was about to apply to the amplification of the business. Many were of opinion that he ought to double the profit-share of Alick Ferrier; and not a few, that, in Barneson's place, they would buy him altogether out of the firm.—But no one saw cause for blame in the purchase of Heronhurst. The health of his daughter required a milder climate; and they accepted the purchase as a testimony to his accession of opulence.

Birmingham was in fact proud of Barneson. He was a man of its own making. He was successful, he was prosperous, yet did not presume on his success and prosperity to wrestle to their detriment for a place in its councils or representation. His purse was always open, his advice was always to be had. But he aspired to no civic distinctions. It sufficed him that the name of Lambert and Co. should be exalted.

The consequence was that the envious Ferrier could never get up a cry against him.

Millionary or no millionary, he remained as much respected by his brother-manufacturers, as beloved by his men. He was a just man. They could find no fault in him.

"You command first-rate society in your new neighbourhood, I believe, Mr. Barneson?" observed Mrs. Ferrier, a dry, self-sufficient woman, whose remote cousinship to a Scotch baronet was seldom out of her thoughts. "A great relief after the low-bred Birmingham vulgarians."

"The only persons with whom I have at present been in contact at Heronhurst," he replied coldly, "are masons and carpenters."

"But you have of course ascertained who are your nearest neighbours?"

"We have a pretty little village not much more than a mile from the lodge," replied Mark, in all simplicity. "The Rectory is a cheerful-looking place; but the living belongs to some dignitary of the Church, who, I fear, is seldom resident."

It was not, however, of the rectory Mrs. Ferrier wanted to hear. Anything clerical, short of a silk apron and lawn sleeves, was beneath her notice.

"Surely," argued she, "if you have nothing more attractive for Barbara,—(Miss Barneson I suppose we must call her *now*,) than an empty parsonage, she will be apt to regret the gay folks with whom she has lately been associating?—"

"My girl has always been contented with the company of her father, brother, and aunt," replied Mark gravely.

"*That* was before she was of an age to require social pleasures," retorted the sententious lady. "From all I could learn from Jones the land-agent, when he was here respecting the valuation of Heronhurst, the nearest neighbour, (to speak of,) lives about four miles off.—Lord Ullesmere,—the *Marquis* of Ullesmere"—

"Ullesmere?" repeated Barneson, musingly.

—"I have read his name in the newspapers as speaking occasionally in the House of Lords. —A poor speaker."

"Not a poor *man*, however," sharply rejoined Mrs. Ferrier. "His lordship's rent-roll, Mr. Jones informed us, is between forty and fifty thousand a-year—"

"And with, probably, forty or fifty thousand claims upon it!" rejoined Barneson.—"I look upon that sort of income as I do on the Queen's Civil List."

"His lordship certainly indulges expensive tastes. One hears of him as a constant purchaser at Christie's, or presiding at Dilettanti dinners. Lord Ullesmere is the bosom friend of our Scotch Duke of Dumbarton, who maintains scores of artists in Rome, Paris, and London,—working away, on canvass or marble, on his account."

"If he have wherewithal to pay them, so much the better for the world at large!" replied the uncensorious Mark. "As to Lord

Ullesmere, the dinners he presides over or the pictures he buys, are not likely to concern *me*. A Marquis with £50,000 a-year, has other occupations for his time than to waste it on a nail-maker!" said Barneson, with a proud but ironical smile.

"You seem to take delight in cheapening the firm of Lambert and Co.!" rejoined the lady, tartly. "Yet we unquestionably rank among the first engineers in the British empire. But rate *us* and Birmingham as low as you please, the Marquis of Ullesmere is scarcely likely to overlook the brother-in-law of the Earl of Arden, whose estates march with his own."

"My dear Mrs. Ferrier," remonstrated Mark, amused by her bitterness, "estates that extended from Sussex to Warwickshire, would produce somewhat more than £50,000 a-year!"

"Who was talking of Warwickshire, Mr. Barneson? — Who was talking of Warwick-

shire ?—Does not Allonby Priory lie with seven miles of Heronhurst ?"

"And *what* and *whose* is Allonby Priory ?"

"As if you could possibly be ignorant; when any Peerage or Itinerary could inform you !"

"But what leisure have I to dabble in Peerages and Itineraries ? — The Bracknell Works would not thank me much for indulging in such studies ! — Your manner, however, implies that Allonby is a seat of Lord Arden's ?—"

"And one of the most interesting old places in the kingdom ! *Too* ancient, apparently, to suit the taste of the family ; for it has been uninhabited for nearly half a century. Jones informed us that Lady Littlecote, who has a claim to it as a dower-house, prefers residing at her step-son's gate, at Arden, in a house which was thought none too grand for our Mr. Lambert's widow, to such a Robinson-Crusoe sort of a place as Allonby."

"If none of the family reside there, it will be no great acquisition to us. But you seem well up in the statistics of the Heronhurst neighbourhood. Did Jones say anything of an old-fashioned house on the Hastings road? —Forest, something or other, I think they call it."

"Weald Forest?—Yes. It belongs to a family of noble name—Percy—Howard—or—"

"Herbert, perhaps?" interrupted Barneson.

"Exactly!—A Mr. and Mrs. Herbert, who were very solicitous about the letting or selling of Heronhurst,—naturally afraid of having unpleasant neighbours."

"My motive for asking is, that the only visiting cards left on me at present are those of a Mr. and Mrs. Herbert, without address. I concluded they must be too well known to need one, and instinctively connected them with a considerable mansion high up among the woods, within view of our terrace."

"Weald Forest, of course. Jones's report of you must have been satisfactory, since they called so soon."

"There is a Herbert at Baliol, of whom Ned is always talking.—They have the same private tutor. He may possibly be a son of these near neighbours."

"Nothing more likely. Through *him*, Mr. and Mrs. Herbert have doubtless learned your connection with Lord Arden, which accounts for their civility."

"If you knew my son better, Mrs. Ferrier," said Barneson, a little nettled, "you would be as certain as I am that he is the last young fellow to make a boast of the relationship."

"And now I think of it," added his loquacious companion, "is not Herbert the name of Colonel Knowles's well-married sister, of whom I have heard Miss Christina speak so often?"

"Perhaps, — possibly.—I seldom interest myself in the names or affairs of people who

are strangers to me," said Mark, without intending a sarcasm on the prying lady of the Bracknell Works. "But sooner or later, we shall hear and see enough of Weald Forest. By Midsummer, I trust to be established at Heronhurst. My sister-in-law talks of being home in June."

And for their reception in June, accordingly, he was diligently preparing. And there are few pleasanter occupations under the sun than to embellish a beautiful spot for the reception of a beloved object. A bride or bridegroom is usually the object of this species of worship. But with such love, mingles ever an alloy of selfishness. In the case of poor Barneson and his child, a treasure vouchsafed him perhaps but for a time, and, like the rose on its stem, or butterfly in the air, only the more prized for its evanescence, the adoration was pure from mortal stain, and intense in proportion.

When he beheld the white walls of Heronhurst basking in the sun of June, the gardens a

wilderness of blossom, the groves a panoply of shade, the house itself combining all that modern art and science have combined to minister to the comfort or delectation of the human frame, instead of reflecting with shame how large a portion of old Mark Holden's fortune had been absorbed in bringing it to perfection, and to how many useful and honourable purposes the money might have been applied, he could have wept for joy as he whispered within himself — "If the climate should but agree with her like the south of France!—If she should only say that Heronhurst is the prettiest place she ever saw in her life!"—

She *did* say so.—Towards evening, on the longest day of the year, when the little domain was bathed in a haze of golden light, in an atmosphere of fragrance far exceeding the oppressive lusciousness of the sweet south they had left behind, the travellers made their appearance; and the delight of Barbara, as

she resumed her childhood's place upon her father's knee, with her head nestled on his shoulder, was far too great for words. Perceiving that it was tears, as well as smiles, she was concealing, he trusted they were tears of joy. But the joy arose wholly from being again in her father's arms. If a thought of the beautiful scene around her presented itself, it was to mar the perfect happiness of her heart. There was nothing at Heronhurst commemorative of that other object of her filial affection,—that lost one,—that dear one, —who, at Whortle Hill, or even at murky old Bracknell, would have seemed present with them both!—

She was careful, however, to guard against a word that could distress him; careful not to seem otherwise than a partaker of his evident pride in Heronhurst; and when, at length, she raised her head to gaze upon the fair landscape, and hanging on his arm, wandered through the comfortable rooms, her eyes looked so like

those of her mother when thanking him for some act of kindness, that he was grateful when a servant called him away, that he might not, on the day of her return home, discourage his darling Barbara by the sight of his saddened face.

Ah! man, man, man!—incapable of understanding that those repressed tears, and the reminiscences from which they sprang, constituted the strongest bond of union between you and your child;—that Barbara would have loved you a million times more for cherishing the memory of the mother who was seldom absent from her thoughts, than for all the care and cost bestowed in the choice of carpets for her chamber, or flowers for her conservatory!—

On the other hand, the delight of Barneson in welcoming his child was without alloy. In her eight months of absence, Barbara had acquired not only strength and stature, but a womanly and intelligent sedateness that promised him a companion as well as an idol.

The brightness of health now bloomed on her cheeks and beamed from her eyes; and in the finding herself again at home, again hand-in-hand with her father, again face to face with the faithful old servants to whom her own was as that of an angel, she afforded so perfect a picture of human happiness, that poor Mark, after following her step by step with pride and exultation, could scarcely set bounds to his gratitude towards the Aunt Arden who was the means of restoring to him his endangered treasure.

CHAPTER XII.

There was but one drawback on Barbara's satisfaction,—but one, at least, that she cared to avow; and even Lady Arden and Althy could sympathise in her disappointment that her brother was not at home to bid her welcome.

"He will be here next week, darling," said her father, in reply to her murmurs. "Ned is gone yachting to Norway, with a party of brother Oxonians, to fish in the fiords. It

seems the fashion of the day," he continued, turning to Lady Arden;—"and whatever that may be, it seems, whether to a young man's taste or not, must be his pursuit!"

"In this case, luckily, a very harmless one," she replied; "except that it involves like all modern sports, cigars and brandy-and-water. —Edward, of course, has by this time been dipped in the Styx of the nineteenth century."

"Ned is so free from the vices of the day," pleaded Barneson, "that we may safely allow him a few of its follies. I have very flattering accounts of him from Oxford. They tell me he is likely to obtain honours. He has the same head for mathematics," continued Mark, with a significant smile, "which has distinguished other members of the Lambert family. Of mine, there is no trace in him. You must have noticed," he added in a lower voice, "the same likeness which I have just been tracing in Lady Althea, to your poor

brother Zack?—But perhaps you scarcely remember him?"

Lady Arden only wished that she did *not*, and that she could be secure from ever hearing his name again. She evaded the question by further reference to her nephew.

"With whom is Edward yachting?" she inquired; and this was a point that Barneson would as willingly have avoided as she the allusion to her degraded brother. His candid nature recoiled from the "I scarcely know," which more conventionised men do not consider disingenuous.

"They are a party of six. The yacht belongs, I believe, to Lord Bernard Vere. The others are a Mr. Herbert,—Sir Walter Wrottesley,—Mr. Ralph Stroud, and Mr. Littlecote."

Lady Arden grew white as ashes. The second blow to her pride within five minutes! But her brother-in-law, vexed to have been forced into naming the aristocratic connec-

tions already formed by his son, saw nothing of her emotion. He was thinking only of Ned.

"It is a lucky thing for my boy," said he, "that by one of those co-incidences we are apt to disbelieve when recounted, his most intimate Baliol friend proves to be the son of our nearest neighbour here."

"Lord Bernard Vere?" inquired Lady Arden,—far more interested in the last name he had pronounced.

"No, Mr. Herbert;—whose family reside at the old-fashioned house visible yonder among the woodlands."

"Very fortunate for Edward. Are there daughters? Are the Herberts eligible people?"

"I have seen little of them. There are several daughters. Lord Ullesmere's place, Mapleford, is three miles further; and a few more on the same road bring you to the valley of the Lede,—in the centre of which stands Allonby Priory."

"*Allonby Priory?*"—exclaimed Lady Arden, more startled than before.—"Are we then so near it?"

"About seven miles, as the crow flies. It stands within two of the sea."

"How strange that it should never have occurred to me!"—mused rather than observed Lady Arden. "When you wrote me word, two months ago, that you had purchased a house in Sussex, you did not mention in what district."

"I was not then aware that Lord Arden had property in the county. And it matters little, I fear, as the place is scarcely habitable."

"I have never seen it," she replied. "Lady Littlecote declined to take up her residence there, though the appointed dower-house of the family; fancying the place too large for her means, and too lonely for her daughter."

"Perhaps, while you are here, you may

feel inclined to drive to Allonby, and judge for yourself?"—

Lady Arden eagerly assented; then, felt inclined to retract her assent. She did not desire that Althy on her return home, should describe her as making a survey of the Arden property,— least of all, of its dower-house. And she was as much too proud to say to her child "do not mention this to your father," as to request Mark Barneson would keep their expedition to Allonby a secret from her daughter.

Two days afterwards, the travellers, recovered from the fatigues of a long journey at that glaring season, ordered the sociable after luncheon, for a country drive, and proceeded to Mapleford, Lord Ullesmere's beautiful domain; where the young cousins imagined that their expedition was to end. But their drive was to be considerably extended: first, through the ferny, copsy wilds of Weald forest;—afterwards, be-

tween hedges overgrown with honey-suckles and briar roses; ending in flowery, bowery, green lanes, which, in the parched unfenced provinces in which they had been sojourning, would have been accounted garden ground.

In the pastures adjoining the road, the haymakers were at work, singing, chattering, shouting; making labour a game, and filling the atmosphere with the fragrance of the newly-mown grass. Nor could Lady Althea refrain from whispering to the homelier cousin whose thoughts were more of "papa," than of honey-suckles or hay-fields, "after all, dear Barbe, the '*plaisant pays de France*' is not half so pleasant as our native land."

By degrees, the poetry of the scene gave way to prose. Arable land succeeded to hay field and copse. The roads widened. The hedges were neatly trimmed; and the ditches, instead of affording a study to the botanist, were carefully cleaned out. Well-kept farms, whose barnyards swarmed with

freckled children, speckled poultry, and cattle lowing at their troughs like politicians over their wine, imparted an air of prosperity to the scene. Stacks of corn, hay, and wood, raised on stone stiles above the spongy soil, would have sufficed to prove, even had not the level road, a turf stack here and there adjoining some poorer cottage, and the shimmer of a winding river seen through the scattered trees, attested that they had entered the valley of the Lede; in the heart of which, stands Allonby Priory.

"What are those hoary old walls?" inquired Lady Althea, on perceiving, between the giant boles of the venerable trees, its battlemented outline. "Are they the ruins of a church,—a Castle,—or a habitation?"

"A little of all three," replied Barneson, amused by the enthusiasm with which she started forward to survey the "reverend face of the tall pile."—"Beyond, and still out of sight, are the ruins of Allonby Priory;—the Prior's house constituting the village church.

The square tower before you was once the Hospitium in which travellers of rank were entertained by the Prior. But the place must have looked more imposing when yonder green embankment was a moat, and the ivy-hooded gateway covered a drawbridge."

"Allonby—Allonby?"—murmured Lady Althea. "Surely, mother, that is the name of some old manor belong to the Littlecotes?"—

Lady Arden was leaning back in the carriage, looking so pale and absent, that her daughter scarcely liked to repeat the inquiry.

"Yes, darling,—it is your father's property," said she, faintly. "But I have never been here with him. The people do not know us; and I wish them to consider us strangers."

"But at least, let us have a closer view of the place!" pleaded Althy. "Barbara would like it too—wouldn't you, dear Barbe?—The ruins would be the very thing for one of your sepia sketches. You might send it to Signora

Letizia, in the portfolio I am to dispatch to her at Christmas."

On her cousin's seconding her curiosity, it was settled that Barneson should escort the two girls over the ruins, and visit as much of the Priory as the aged portress could be induced to exhibit. Lady Arden remained in the carriage, near the old gateway; where a group of elm-trees of great antiquity threw their stag-horned branches across the road.

A painful reminiscence of her own first intrusion into the Arden pleasure-grounds, the origin of her ill-omened marriage, was overclouding her mind. Already, she repented of this furtive visit to the dower-house of the family. Lord Arden, should it reach his ears, might fancy her solicitous about the accommodations awaiting her widowhood!

So long a time, however, was occupied by the girls in their survey of the old cloisters, abounding in disenterred stone coffins and fragments of flasks which attested the extent

and liberality of the Prior's cellar, that she had time to recover her self-possession; time to admire the twisted stems of ivy, centuries old, which now sustained the walls to which they had once clung for support; while their overgrowth of foliage crested with masses of glossy green the crumbling battlement.

But this grave verdure, with tufts of wood-fern or stonecrop springing from occasional interstices, alone diversified the grey lichen-tinted walls, tempered by the frost of five hundred winters, and parched by five hundred summer-suns. A modern flower would have been out of place amidst that stark and still and solemn desuetude. For the bleached tint of our Anglo-Saxon ruins,—the ghastly hue of the fossil and the skeleton,—conveys a far stronger impression of age than the green bronzes or yellow marbles of ancient Greece and Rome.

One natural embellishment however enlivened the spot. Between the stems of the stately

trees, glimmered the winding Lede; bringing with its flowing tide, fresh gales from the adjacent Channel; and at all times, brightening, like a silver ribbon, the valley whose banks were clothed with hanging woods, which now exhibited their richest Midsummer verdure.

Within view of the Priory, the flowing waters were widened almost into a lake by a mill-dam; the clack of whose wheel afforded the only variation to the monotonous cawing of the rooks colonised in the elm-grove growing close to the square grey tower, as if endeavouring to peep through its mullioned windows, or afford it companionship of congenial age.

Along the banks of the Lede, where at low tide, the otter left its trace in webbed foot-prints and fish-bones, the glaucous tint of the water-weeds betrayed the brackish nature of the stream; the haunt, in winter, of the snipe and mallard,—in summer of the bright-winged king-fisher, sandpiper, and water ousel.

These traces of aboriginal nature, however,

had not escaped the innovations of modern farming. Dainty shapely Alderneys were grazing in the pastures adjoining the Priory; and the Polish fowls dotting the turf within its very precincts, might have been the pets of a poultry-show. A curious admixture of past and present!—Reminiscences of cowl and sandal, pilgrims and pursuivants, interspersed with wideawakes and varnished boots!—

"And this solitude, should I survive him, is to be our home!" glanced involuntarily into the mind of the Countess. The future position of her daughter, in case of the decease of either parent, had been too often the subject of uneasy contemplation, for every contingency awaiting the destiny of Lady Althea not to have presented itself.

But how to connect uneasy contemplations with the animated and beautiful girl who now came bounding through the old gateway, in advance of her cousin and uncle;—the glow of youth upon her cheek, and her rich dark hair

disordered by the impetuosity of her movements.

"Oh! mother, dearest mother," cried she, darting into the carriage, and, having seated herself close to Lady Arden, eagerly kissing the face to which sad thoughts imparted unwonted sadness,—"I wish we had not left you behind!—I wish, I wish, you had been persuaded to come with us!—Such a charming old place!—A castle of Otranto,—a Melrose to 'visit by the pale moonlight!'—Long gloomy passages, green with damp;—winding turret stairs, leading to the battlemented roof. —If you had but come with us!"—

By this time, Barbara and her father, sober and unexcited, rejoined them; and they were soon on their homeward way, through the fragrant lanes and across the forest with its golden entanglements of furze and broom.

"Was not that austere Gothic hall a perfect picture, Barbe?"—inquired Lady Althea, still

harping on the Priory. "Did you ever see a more interesting old place?"

"It looked rather comfortless, after Heronhurst," said Barbara, thus forced into giving an opinion.

"Comfortless!—But how much nobler! —Heronhursts are to be sold,—Heronhursts are to be bought. But who could purchase an Allonby Priory? Did you not hear that charming old portress, who looks more like a moss-grown stone of the ancient structure than flesh and blood,—say that the Manor was bestowed on Sir Rupert Littlecote, at the Reformation, by Henry the Eighth; and that an Enguerrand de Lidecote was among the priors buried there, in the days of King John?—I liked her better for telling me that, mother, than even for dropping a curtsey every time she pronounced the name of the 'Yarl,' or the 'Countess.'"

"But how came you to talk to her of the Earl and Countess?"—

"If you fancy she allowed us to talk to her! —Be assured she kept all the conversation to herself. The old lady seems as devoted to the family as if they lived constantly at Allonby. The 'Yarl (who visits the place occasionally,') she said, 'is the grandest-looking gentleman between this and the Land's End. The Countess is a kind lady, and sends every Christmas a mint o' money to the poor:—only, being Warwickshire-born, she prefers Arden Hall:—which she wouldn't noways a do, Miss, if she'd ever seen the sun rise or set on the old Priory when the tide's up," continued Althy, in the croaking voice of the infirm adherent of the family; again endeavouring to cheer up her mother by a fond embrace.

"But why not tell Lady Arden what she added respecting the *daughter* of the Yarl and Countess?" rejoined Mr. Barneson, a little shocked at the egotism of her family pride.

"She only said 'twar a thousand pities the

girl warn't a boy; 'cause the property 'ould go to a parson whom nubb'dy never hear tell on.'—But I hope you heard that when Barbe questioned her about young Lady Healthy, she informed her that 'folks said' I was as beautiful as an angel, and a match for a prince.—Deny it if you can, uncle, deny it if you can!"—

To utter a vexatious word to that joyous being, would have been a difficult task; especially to those who saw the adoration pictured in her mother's eyes. No Chaldean could have worshipped a bright particular star more fervently, than the solitary wife that only child.

As they approached Heronhurst on their return, any one less inordinately endowed than Althea with the prejudices of caste, could not but have been struck by the suavity of the scene, in comparison with the cramped valley of the Lede. The sweeping landscape, to which the well-planted paddocks almost pre-

tending to the name of park, afforded a richly-cultivated foreground,—the fragrance elicited by the evening sun from the lawns and shrubberies, — the cheerful-looking modern house, its western windows lighted up into a blaze by the same auspicious radiance,—all looked so hopeful, so prosperous, so shone upon by the favour of Heaven, that it seemed as though the ghastly fragment of antique life they had left behind, ought to subside at once into the grave.

But a thousand times brighter and more beautiful did Heronhurst become in the eyes of Barbara and her father, when, on driving to the door, they were welcomed under the portico by an open-faced, sun-browned, hearty-looking young fellow, still attired in his rough fishing dress, who was speedily folded in the arms of his sister and father.

Another young man, taller, older, but similarly accoutred, stood at a little distance in the

background, waiting to be presented in form to the family.

"They were but just arrived. As there was not wind enough to carry them on to Portsmouth or Cowes, they had landed from the yacht at Newhaven, as being nearer home for Herbert and himself."

Lady Arden, not yet alighted from the carriage, was at a sufficient distance from the group to remain still in doubt whether the handsome young stranger whom she saw heartily shaken by the hand by her brother-in-law, and smiled on by Barbara, had been announced to them by the name of Littlecote !—

CHAPTER XIII.

The neighbourhood of Heronhurst was neither better nor worse than the average of country neighbourhoods,—neither before nor behind the march of civilisation. But the railroad which, by leaving Allonby at fifteen miles' distance, enabled it to retain its simplicity of manners, and wear its "antique ruff and bonnet," had established a station at within five of Heronhurst; thereby securing constant change of society,—much to the

benefit of those to whom variety is an object.

In the case of the Barnesons, this was desirable; for the aborigines were but moderately well-disposed towards the new-comers. But they had been still less so towards Mr. Barneson's predecessor, Sir Drewry Hart. The Herberts, an old county family, though far from the most important landholders in the district, were, by reason of constant residence, the most influential. The Marquis of Ullesmere, who possessed interests in Scotland of higher account than in Sussex; and, above all, in London and Westminster; like most men whose minds have once simmered over the Phlegethon of politics, was always nursing and keeping warm some political wrath touching what was passing in China or Peru; some suspected cabinet intrigue at Naples, Paris, or Vienna. His Lordship, as became a K.G., had his eye on the Pope, as well as considerable misgivings concerning the new President of the

United States. Such a man was not likely to busy himself with parish scandal; and was consequently content to accept his intelligence concerning his neighbourhood from those who, like the Herberts, were constantly on the spot. *Their* interest in the progress of the world was bounded by quickset hedges and ox-rails; and the events of *their* year were Quarter Sessions and Assizes. All they knew of the wide, wide world was brought them in a monthly book-box, from a circulating library; and a yesterday's "Times." But what they *did* know, they knew thoroughly;—had the pedigree of the new proprietor of Heronhurst at their fingers' ends; and could calculate to a penny the cost of his steam-conservatory and carved-oak sideboard.

There were no antecedent grounds for animosity. No county family had been displaced to make way for the Barnesons. In the first victorious campaign of his rail-share warfare, Sir Drewry Hart had purchased at

the Auction-mart a few farms in the neighbourhood of the South Downs; *not* with a view to the cultivation of sheep or eating of wheat-ears, but as an eligible investment. On visiting the spot, however, the local beauties so captivated the man who just then occupied the pedestal of the Golden Calf which modern idolatry has set up, that he bought out the farmers, surrounded the estate with a ring-fence, and, like the Caliph Haroun Al-Raschid, builded himself, on the spot, a pleasure-palace.

But though he dislodged only a bumpkin or two with whom the Herberts had kept up a series of Punic wars,—vengeance and perjury for rabbit-snaring on one side, and riding over wheat on the other,—the family at Weald Forest instinctively set up its bristles at the approach of Sir Drewry; a man whose meanest garment was supposed to be sewn with golden thread. It was a real satisfaction to them when, before time had been allowed him to

make a fool of himself in either of the seats he had purchased,—in Sussex or the House of Commons,—his name appeared in the Gazette!—They began to fancy their own farthings into shillings again, now that sovereigns were no longer likely to be broadcast in the meadows and flower-borders of Heronhurst.

Not that the Herberts were poor. In any other empire than the British, they would have passed for opulent. But they counted their children as the Jews count their oranges, thirteen to the dozen; and according to the French dictum touching our prolific nation,—"*se ruinaient en enfans.*" What they lost in ready money, however, they seemed to gain in ascendancy. Not one among the thirteen olive branches surrounding the table of Weald Forest and exhausting its resources, was remarkable for beauty, talent, or amiability. Moderate abilities, moderately good looks, and tempers rather the reverse of moderate, formed the characteristics of the race. But when these

were brought to bear, in the aggregate, on passing events, they carried weight. The seven girls talked people down; the six young men knocked people up; and by pulling together in every public catastrophe, pulled each other through. No obstacle availed against their united perseverance. If defeated, they turned sulky; and the combination of half-a-dozen sullen faces amounts to the blackness of a thunder-cloud!—

When, therefore, this amiable family was apprised that, in place of Sir Drewry Hart, who, as a valetudinarian old bachelor, might have been easily kept down, Heronhurst had fallen into the hands of a wealthy forge-master, a widower with a grown-up son and daughter, they indulged in murmurs which somewhat resembled the growling of bears.

The girls foresaw that they should be eclipsed by the splendours of a Birmingham miss;—the boys, that the young nailer, with his first-rate hunters and pointers, would cut

them out of the field. Already, they began to daub on their war-paint.

For the prominence of their position in the neighbourhood, the Herberts were mainly indebted to the long-standing friendship of the Ullesmeres. Herbert senior was a brother Harrovian of the Marquis; and, as a gay guardsman when his lordship was a beardless M.P. mechanically aye-ing and no-ing in the Lower House in the name of his father's borough of Mapleford, they had heard the chimes at midnight in each other's company. When, therefore, Lord Ullesmere beheld, in later life, his country neighbour struggling against press of offspring, he did all that can be done with decency to afford out-door relief to a well-born gentleman;—sent him venison when he killed a buck;—carp, when his ponds were dragged,—and a living for one of his cubs, when some black-coated Helot of his lordship's was removed to a better cure, or better world. A commission in the line, and clerk-

ship in the Treasury, provided for a couple more, when Lord Ullesmere himself was in the Cabinet.

These were lasting benefits. But as three young Herberts still remained at grass, (the estate of Weald being entailed on the eldest,) they guarded carefully, against all and sundry innovators, the avenues of Mapleford.

The young ladies of the family, on the other hand, who had made themselves highly acceptable to the Marchioness by reading to her in rainy weather, listening to her maunderings when there was no company in the house, or singing, dancing, and flirting for the amusement of company in the house, when Lady Ullesmere was suffering from the megrims, were jealous of any one likely to supersede them in their vocation of toadies; and on the constancy of a great lady suffering under a fit of ennui, who can count?—

Nevertheless, on the first intimation that the fine furniture and rare exotics daily

arriving at their railway-station addressed to Heronhurst, were preliminary to the arrival of a beautiful girl of seventeen, a cabinet-council was held among them, in which they decided to be extremely civil to the strangers. The daughter, if really an heiress, might turn out a prize for Alfred, the hereditary Prince of Cubdom:—the son, if presentable, for Lou., the least good-looking of the girls.—At all events, during the eight months' annual absence of the Ullesmeres, Heronhurst, wealthy and cheerful, would be a great acquisition.

Hence, the early visiting cards. Hence, the anxious enquiries of the Herberts into the name and antecedents of their new neighbour.

But what was the surprise and exasperation of Mrs. Herbert, on discovering that the man she had been quietly whispering down, in the neighbourhood, as a nobody, a Brummagem nailer, whom, in a commercial country like England, it was everybody's *duty* to patronise,

was own brother to her own sister-in-law, Mrs. Knowles!—Though herself as unacceptable to the Herbert family, into which she had been promoted by her beauty, as Maria Barneson to the Knowleses, she had looked down with redoubled scorn from the altitudes of Weald Forest, upon the daughter of the bankrupt apothecary; whose sister was married to a retired linendraper, and whose mother matron to a hospital!

Colonel Knowles having passed the greater portion of his life in foreign garrisons, the courtly lady had heard nothing of the Barnesons since the inauspicious epoch of his marriage. Her brother, who now commanded a regiment in India, with C. B. attached to his name, was a creditable relation to refer to, when the Sikh war, or the present state of Scinde, came under discussion at the Ullesmeres' table. But, as she had thus betrayed the relationship, it would be terrible indeed, if these people at Heronhurst turned out

vulgar and odious, and presumed upon the connection.

Of her daughters, the Pleiades of Weald, the disgust was still more pronounced.—How could they ever again show their faces at Mapleford, or what chance had they of forming suitable establishments in the county, when it became known that these Birmingham people were by marriage "Cousins-in-law once removed!"—

The Miss Herberts, who might have become meritorious women if thinned out, or planted out by judicious cultivation, resembled acorns crowded Irish-fashion, into a lazy-bed, to produce only the weakest of saplings.—Some superannuated reader of these pages, may recall to mind how, during the popularity of Hannah More's "Cœlebs," society was overrun by Lucillas. Every young lady on her preferment was modelled after that exemplary heroine.—Di Vernon, too, created a legion of imitators; till driven from the field by the more

feminine Georgys of Mr. Ward's "Tremaine;" and as a tolerable original is better than the best copy, most of these artificially-drilled damsels would have been preferable in a natural state.—But when the popularity of what is called the Serious novel brought the artless school into vogue, the incessant prattle of naïve young ladies, especially in country houses, became as serious a nuisance as the twittering aviaries at the Zoological. It was even proposed by some crusty bachelor, that, as it is now a matter of penalty for factory-chimnies to consume their own smoke, every large family should be required to consume its own prattle, on peril of a massacre of the Innocents.

Charles Lamb, one of the most zealous guardians of the spontaneity of the human character, inveighs against the "coxcombry of book-taught charity." And the hypocrisies of book-taught *naïveté* are unquestionably prominent among the failings of modern Miss-hood.

Where parents and a daughter or two reside together, the practicality of the elders keeps within bounds the deluge of milk and water; and the ties of human affection, closer drawn, admit of no imposture. But a family of "charming girls" like the Herberts, prattling in society only of school-feasts and flannel clubs, dear papa and dear mamma, dearest Sophy and darling Anne, and some delightful preacher for whose mediæval church they are embroidering altar-cloths, and for whose missionary fancy-fair they are scrubbing-brushing sketchy landscapes, — but whose talk among themselves is embittered with malice, hatred, and all uncharitableness, is a terrible snare. Subtle is the poison of the Belladonna. Subtle was the venom of the united "amiable family" at Weald Forest.

On the day selected for Mrs. Herbert's first visit to Heronhurst, a considerable wrangle had occurred among the Pleiades, as to whose

turn it was to bear her company. For the usual routine of their morning visits, each was apt to shift to the shoulders of her nearest sister the burthen of the day. But on the present occasion, their curiosity was on tiptoe; and it was not till after a dispute very unworthy of the Lambkin School, that Rose and Carry established their claims before a committee of privilege.

Mr. Barneson, who had become acquainted with their father at a parochial-rate-meeting in the course of the winter, had mentioned that his daughter would take up her residence at Heronhurst the following summer, with his maiden sister for chaperon; and it was consequently for "Miss Barneson" that, at the door, enquiry was made.

Assuming her grandest deportment of provincial hauteur, and followed by her supercilious daughters rustling in silk attire, presented to them by Lady Ullesmere on her return from Paris two years before, Mrs. Herbert was

shown into a cheerful book-room, where sat two ladies, simply dressed in coloured muslin; —the younger engaged in writing, the other in reading what looked heinously like a French novel. By the elder, they were received with the courtesy due to a morning call; the visitress remarking in return, that she had taken the earliest opportunity compatible with her engagements to call at Heronhurst, after learning Miss Barneson's arrival. But as the lady whose equivocal studies she had interrupted, replied only by a bow of acknowledgment, she was again forced to take the initiative.

"You have been spending the winter abroad?" said she, with an air of much condescension.

"We have just returned from Nice."

"But you have resided chiefly, I believe, in Warwickshire?"

"In Warwickshire;—in the neighbourhood of Birmingham," was the unabashed reply.

"You will find the climate here, and I flatter myself I may add, the society, somewhat of an improvement," observed Mrs. Herbert with a fastidious smile.

"I was born in Warwickshire, and entertain the old English prejudice in favour of native air," replied the lady so haughtily addressed, in a tone of self-assertion which Mrs. Herbert considered somewhat out of place in the daughter of a bankrupt apothecary, whom she had reason to believe was born at W. It was becoming necessary, in fact, to crush her at once.

"Our nearest neighbours, the Ullesmeres, will arrive from town next week," said she, shaking her embroidered handkerchief, ostentatiously displayed. "Her ladyship, who has delicate health, does not visit generally in the neighbourhood, and never dines from home; though of course she makes an exception in favour of an old county family, like that of Mr. Herbert of Weald. But I have only to

name you to her to secure her immediate notice. Her ladyship is a most charming person; perfectly affable and unpretending."

"I have had the pleasure of knowing Lady Ullesmere for many years. I am glad to find that her country neighbours consider her charming," replied Lady Arden, little suspecting that she was mistaken for Christina Barneson, and wondering what Mrs. Herbert meant by oppressing her with such uncoveted patronage. A slight glance towards her daughter, who, disturbed from her writing, was endeavouring to propitiate the taciturnity of the Miss Herberts,—who remained demure and perpendicular as a couple of lay-figures, vouchsafing occasional monosyllables in reply to her advances,—did not prepossess her in favour of the juniors of the family.

"Since you are so well acquainted, ma'am, with Lady Ullesmere," resumed Mrs. Herbert, sternly, in the tone of an unpaid magistrate

cross-examining an impostor, "you of course know her daughters?"

"I was at Lady Victoria's wedding," replied Lady Arden coldly. "Lady Charlotte Brooke has lived so many years at Naples, that I scarcely remember her. She wrote to me, however, when we were at Nice, begging me not to forget her if we proceeded further South."

This was almost too much. The bankrupt apothecary's daughter solicited for a visit, and apparently in vain, by the daughter of the Marquis of Ullesmere!—Mrs. Herbert was half inclined to attack her with enquiries after Mrs. Knowles, to prove herself conversant with the insignificance of her race. But it had been agreed, in full Weald synod, that the Knowles relationship was to be ignored. She contrived, however, to infuse so much additional ill-humour and impertinence into her countenance, that Lady Arden, out of patience, rang the bell and desired the servant to inform Miss Barneson of Mrs. Herbert's visit.

"Miss Barneson was out driving with master in the pony phaeton," was the unwelcome reply: on which Lady Arden apologised coldly for the absence of her niece, and Lady Althea expressed to the supercilious young ladies her regrets that her cousin should not be at home to make their acquaintance. This allusion to the relationship between them confirmed the opinion already formed by the damsels of Weald, that the handsome girl so simply-dressed and simply-mannered, was some poor relation of the Birmingham manufacturer.

"We are expecting home one of my sons, who has been on a fishing-expedition to Norway," observed Mrs. Herbert, languidly, that she might not make too hurried an exit after learning the absence of the young lady of the house. "I see by this morning's paper that the Comus, Lord Bernard Vere's yacht, which took the party to Christiana, has been signalled at Cowes."

"Yes,—my nephew, Edward Barneson, and Sir Walter Wrottesley, who accompanied them, have been with us since Tuesday," was the reply. "*They* disembarked at Newhaven, as there was not wind enough that evening to carry them to Cowes."

Mrs. Herbert felt too indignant for words. Were *all* her courtcards to be overtrumped? Moreover, Lady Arden, anxious lest in discussing the yachting-party she should mention the name of Rupert Littlecote, began to look so *very* discouraging, that Mrs. Herbert put on all her majesty, asked for her carriage, and, followed by the two lay-figures, bowed herself out of the room.

"I'm glad poor Barbara was out of the way, mamma," said Althy, as soon as the grating of wheels announced the departure of the carriage. "What tiresome people!—I hope my uncle has not many such uninteresting neighbours!"—

Sincerely did her mother hope so too; for

she had accepted Mr. Barneson's invitation to spend a few weeks at Heronhurst previous to her return to Arden. The Earl was still detaned in town by his parliamentary duties,—that well-worn apology for conjugal eclipse; and she had no inclination to establish herself at the Hall while the limited extent of their family party rendered the bridegroom at the Manor House a prominent feature. Fleecy and his affirmatives, every day and all day long, would be a sad drawback on the pleasures of home.

CHAPTER XIV.

Lady Arden was not required, just then, to put the dilemma to proof. That very afternoon, before she had time even to interrogate her brother-in-law concerning his royal and imperial-seeming neighbour of Weald Forest, he was summoned to W. to attend the funeral of his mother.

"And are *you* to accompany your father?" she inquired of her nephew, while Barneson was issuing orders to his household for

the care of his family and guests during his absence.

"Of course. One cannot make an affliction of the death of an old lady of fourscore, who has been childish these three years. But aunt Chrissy, the kindest of human creatures to me ever since I was born, would be hurt if proper respect were not paid to her mother's memory. When I was a schoolboy at W., I had the most indulgent of holiday homes at St. Margaret's."

Lady Arden wished her nephew had a little more tact than to talk about St. Margaret's in presence of Sir Walter Wrottesley, who already, after a three days' visit, betrayed considerable admiration of Barbara. But it did not much signify. Though she and her daughter, as near relatives, might remain at Heronhurst during the absence of its master, the announcement of family-mourning conveyed a dismissal of casual visitors.

Sir Walter, however, was of necessity to

remain till the following morning. "He could not otherwise start direct for Westmoreland, at which untoward distance Wrottesley Hall was situated; and no one thought it necessary to plunge into the mysteries of Bradshaw, for evidence that the journey might be better managed. He gained little by remaining after the departure of his friend. Barbara, though she had seen the deceased old lady but twice in her life, was sadly out of spirits. She could not bear to part so soon from her father, and was deeply grieved that his heart should again be harassed by domestic trouble. It was on Lady Arden and Althy, therefore, with whom he was little acquainted, that Sir Walter had to exercise his conversational powers, lest the dinner should be reduced to the taciturnity of a Trappist's feast.

His choice of topics was unlucky.—

"Mr. Littlecote, (a relation of yours, I believe,) was with us in the Comus," said he, ad-

dressing Lady Althea, opposite to whom he was seated.

"Mr. Littlecote?—Surely not! He is just married to my aunt Helen," replied the astonished girl. But she had already heard Sir Walter assert so many incredible things, that the announcement need not have surprised her.

"On the contrary, he is just gone back to Oxford, to read for his degree."

"Aunt Helen's husband is the only relation of the name of Littlecote I ever heard of," rejoined Lady Althea; "and *he* never reads anything but the newspapers.—He is an old, old man—older than papa."

"And *my* Littlecote is a year or two older than myself and Ned Barneson. — But you must have more cousins than one, Lady Althea, and my friend is probably one of them;—certainly a near relation of your family, for I remember his telling us when Barneson and I were about to put into New-

haven, that there was a landing-place much nearer to Heronhurst,—(Weald Hard, I think he called it,) where, when he spent his summer holidays at Allonby, he used to keep a boat."

"That accounts for what the old portress at the Priory mentioned the other day," said Lady Althea, turning towards her mother, who was discussing with Barbara the hour at which her father was likely to arrive at W. "She said, that though she had seldom seen the Yarl, and never my lady, a young gentleman with his tutor, a relation of the family, had spent the summer at Allonby, and was 'turrible keen after the trout.' I wonder what cousin,—what relation,—it can possibly have been?"

"It is of little consequence," replied the Countess—the palpitation of whose heart was almost visible through her dress. "If your father were desirous that we should make his acquaintance, he would have brought him to

Arden. There is no greater waste of time, dear Althy, or proof of indiscretion, than endeavouring to force open doors which are locked against us, or ask idle questions on subjects with which it is undesirable we should be acquainted."

Lady Althea was at least sufficiently acquainted with her mother's voice and countenance, to know that henceforward Mr. Rupert Littlecote, whether described as of the Comus or the Priory, was to be as a myth; and she was the last person to transgress a maternal command,—expressed or implied. Sir Walter, confirmed in the opinion he had previously formed, that Lady Arden, if thwarted, was "one who might cut up rough," felt less reluctant to start on the morrow by an early train; and was not altogether sorry that, whatever Rupert Littlecote might be, *he* had not the honour of her relationship.

Though almost determined to leave the conversation during the remainder of dinner

in her ladyship's hands, a sudden reminiscence caused him to exclaim, immediately afterwards, "But by the way, Lady Arden, though you disown my friend Rupert Littlecote, I hope you won't disavow my poor old aunt, Lady Ullesmere; whom I met this morning in the family coach, airing in solemn state on the Lewes road, as Ned and I were endeavouring to make out Mr. Barneson's route in the pony-phaeton, in order to apprise him of the arrival of an express."

"I am not likely to disavow Lady Ullesmere. She is one of my earliest London acquaintances."

"So she said,—after stopping me on the Queen's Highway, and insisting I should stand and deliver the name of the place where I was staying. On learning that you were at Heronhurst, she threatened to call here to-morrow after luncheon, that you might do her the honour of presenting her to the family."

"When Lady Ullesmere hears of Mr. Bar-

neson's melancholy bereavement, she will of course defer the visit."

"But she *won't* hear of it. Lady Ullesmere seldom hears of anything. She is so afraid of being assailed by tittle-tattle, that like the deaf adder, she stoppeth her ears."

"I will write her a note, then, to prevent her taking a useless drive."

"More kind, wouldn't it, to call upon her yourself?—The melancholy event that has occurred, which does not even place you in mourning, affects you, Ned informs me, only as a matter of compliment. Had you heard in what terms Lady Ullesmere spoke of you, dear Lady Arden, you would not grudge the visit!—"

"Is not Lady Ullesmere the old lady who was brought by aunt Lucy and aunt Leonora to hear me play and sing, last year?" inquired Lady Althea.

"Exactly. She has been their bosom friend for the last forty years," replied her mother,

recalling to mind the kindly enthusiasm manifested by the Marchioness at her daughter's performance. "Yes, Sir Walter—I *will* call at Mapleford. Althy can remain with her cousin, to prevent her feeling lonely."

Sir Walter looked as if he would have been a happy man, could the privilege be extended to himself. But already he anticipated an intimacy between the Ullesmeres and Barnesons, which would render his future sojourns at Mapleford very different from his former experience of that stately but dull old place.

On the morrow, he was gone. On the morrow, Lady Arden resolved to make her act of politeness to the venerable Marchioness a pretext for a solitary expedition to Allonby. —She was an excellent walker. By quitting the carriage at a mile's distance from the village, it would be easy to visit the Priory, and ascertain from the old portress, without exciting the gossip of the Heronhurst servants, all she wanted to know.

In Mapleford and its aspect, she was little interested; or the heaviness of the dreary pile might have excited her commiseration.—The park constituted one of those extensive demesnes of the English aristocracy, said to be measured by milestones. But its ancient avenues were damp; its woods wanted thinning; the piece of water formed by the Lede, dammed into sluggishness, was reedy and surfed with scum; and the mulatto-complexioned façade of the house was not improved by the once-gilded window-frames,—weather-worn and tarnished as the regimental suits of an old-clothes' shop. The very servants who hobbled to the door at the summons of the bell, were as obese and sleepy-looking as their liveries were dingy. The hall smelt close and mildewed, by comparison with the fragrant summer atmosphere without; and two dusty trophies of arms on either side of the ancient chimney, carved with the arms of the house of Vere, looked as if they had never

been touched since the war of the Commonwealth.

Ushered with due formality into a finely proportioned saloon, scented with the sickly aroma of stale potpourri which exhaled the reek of spices rather than the fragrance of flowers, she was oppressed on the very threshold by the dulness and dimness of the room. The fine gallery-pictures darkening the walls, slurred by neglect and entombed in massive frames apparently gilt at the same period as those of the windows, were lost in the perpetual twilight of a chamber where the blinds, even in summer, were never raised, lest the colours of the paintings and carpets should suffer from the sun. Such was the decree of the housekeeper; and Lady Ullesmere, as well tutored by her lord as Sara of old, had never in her life offered opposition to a fly. The ponderous sashes were seldom opened: and the stagnant, unventilated atmosphere, though cool from the exclusion of the sun, fell heavy on the spirits.

Beside the marqueterie work-table, where she had stitched or knitted away her summers for the last forty years, sat Lady Ullesmere,—the personification of inoffensive good-nature; —very deaf, very dull, but in charity with herself and all the world;—an obedient wife, a dutiful mother, and a submissive mistress.

Very genuine was her satisfaction in welcoming the visitor announced to her; for having heard from her nephew that Lady Arden was just arrived from Italy, she expected to hear tidings of her daughter, Lady Charlotte Brooke, the wife of the Secretary of Legation at Naples. But though disappointed in this particular, she was gratified by the visit. She was a person apt to be gratified; endowed by nature with so cheerful a spirit, that she always appeared to be picking up nuggets among the sands of life.

The Marquis, if born a century earlier, would probably have been a valuable cabinet-minister of the eighteenth century; and assisted in

losing America and taking the rice out of the mouth of Hindostan. But he had fallen upon times so busy, that public men appear to be always rushing away from an earthquake; and though so eminently conservative, so prodigious a hater of innovation, that he preferred seeing his timber perish, to a timely use of the axe, and bore with his reedy lake, rather than have it cleaned out, he was too ambitious of the name of a Superior Man not to affect to march with the century. Though he accepted what he called "the fusion of classes," as a victim suffering from the toothache shakes hands with the inevitable dentist, Liberalism was his favourite pretension and constant boast.

But if compelled to turn out to grass all the hobbies of his youth, the Marquis still kept an eye upon them in their pasture. His early predilections were kept holy in his heart of hearts; as many a man of fifty keeps sacred in his desk or pocket-book a lock of hair, a pledge

of love in his nonage, though the object of his passion is as extinct as Cleopatra.

It was amusing to hear him unconsciously break into his original tune, in the midst of one of his liberal speeches in the House of Lords, like an old organ out of repair. As, in travelling, one sometimes meets with a parish belonging to Durham in the heart of Yorkshire, the *Libéral malgrè lui* would occasionally variegate his eloquence with some obsolete axiom of ultra-Toryism; which, in the next day's Parliamentary Report, looked like one of the wooden nutmegs with which the Chinese merchants eke out their consignments.

In one respect, however, he was as consistent as respectable. Lord Ullesmere was the kindest of husbands, fathers, friends, masters, landlords.—It was by gentleness, not coercion, he had reduced Lady Arden to her present state of non-entityism. If he had stifled her faculties, he had played the Othello with a pillow of eider-down. On learning from his old friend

Herbert that Heronhurst was about to be occupied by a wealthy manufacturer, a sensible, plain-spoken man, at the head of a firm whose name took a leading place in the commercial world, as well as in the lists of local charities and national institutions, the Marquis was enchanted. Not because the district would benefit by such an acquisition. Not because Barneson was likely to prove an acceptable companion. But because it afforded such a capital opportunity for proving to the world how superior was the Marquis of Ullesmere, K.G. to all prejudices of caste,—all the feudal bigotry of his Order.—

He lost no time in fulminating his Bull. By his greater and lesser vassals, his servitors, tenants, and dependants, the Heronhurstians were to be treated with the utmost respect; while the members of his family were to love their new neighbours as themselves.

Had any shrewd observer among those to whom his lordship's idiosyncrasy was familiar,

been interested in the question, they would have admired how he, so facile and so ready when moving in the polished groove of the great world, laboured and strained when thus working against the grain.—One of Barneson's monster-engines would have been impelled with greater ease than the creaking pullies and wheels of Lord Ullesmere's mind when endeavouring to prove to such people as Herbert of Weald, or one of his former colleagues in the cabinet, that it was his "dooty" to notice the nailer;—"a man to whom the commerce of the country was so largely indebted;—a man whose industry and intellect were the means of pouring thousands,—millions—into the Exchequer;—a man whose establishment, (he was informed—he had never visited Birmingham) afforded model institootions of enlightened benevolence;—a man whose engines were steaming across the Atlantic, and his locomotives across the wilds of—of—India,—that is—Hindostan—" (His lordship loved to per-

fect the euphony of his phrases by three syllables, and an accent on the last.) "Mr. Barneson might be regarded as one of the ablest appropriators of Steam Power; — the creation, if he might be so permitted to speak, that followed nearest in importance to mankind after that recorded in Genesis."

This latter sentence he might as well have omitted in presence of his second son, the Reverend Lord Lionel, who was booked for a bishopric. But the future lawn-sleeves contented himself with the mild rebuke of suggesting the discovery of printing as of some moment; just as his elder son, Lord Mapleford, a Colonel of Militia, hinted the discovery of gunpowder. But both were parentally pooh-poohed.—Lord Ullesmere would hear of nothing, just then, but Steam Power, and Barneson for ever!

Lady Arden, accordingly, who would gladly have been catechised on any other possible subject, found herself questioned and cross-

questioned respecting the Bracknell Works by the Marchioness, who always duteously followed her husband's lead; and never had Lady Ullesmere's deafness proved more trying to her endurance than when it condemned her to shout, in tones that might have filled one of the patent theatres, the history of their rise and progress,—contracts and foreign relations; —the annual profits accruing to the firm,—and the number and names of the shareholders.

Eager to escape, with a view to her Priory expedition, it was a positive relief when the door was thrown open to announce "Mrs. and the Miss Herberts." And as Barneson and Birmingham happened to be the words still echoing through the saloon when it was traversed by the fastidious lady, it was not wonderful that she looked so horror-stricken at finding the daughter of the bankrupt apothecary seated in the place of honour, next to the Marchioness; sharing the well-worn old yellow satin settee,—in the

estimation of Weald Forest almost as enviable a privilege as standing behind the throne.

It was probably because Miss Barneson understood her place better than "poor dear Lady Ullesmere" seemed to know it, that she vacated her post in deference to the new comer. But Mrs. Herbert's patience was almost exhausted when she saw the lady of the house rise from her seat and deposit on the cheek of her departing guest one of those matronly salutes which she was seldom seen to concede to any but her own daughters, Lady Victoria, or Lady Charlotte Brooke.

But her surprise had still to reach its climax. The words, "Order Lady Arden's carriage," pronounced to the groom of the chambers, in Lady Ullesmere's low but articulate voice, fully explained the coldness with which her own uncivil bow had been returned by the supposed Miss Barneson.

"Lady Arden?"—*The* Lady Arden!—and

she Mrs. Herbert of Weald, had treated her as vulgar people treat a tradesperson! —It was all she could do to restrain herself from rushing down stairs and apologising to her in the mildewed hall.

The lady thus misapprehended was, however, already on her road to Allonby: her orders to proceed in that direction having been responded to by the sort of anxious upward gaze by which gardeners and coachmen imply that there is rain in the sky.

Cloudy it certainly was. The atmosphere was darkened, — the birds flew low. — The insects ceased to skim the pools; and hedges and pastures gave forth that fragrant scent, which is as incense offered to the coming shower. On reaching the small bridge over the Lede, from whence Lady Arden had determined to proceed on foot, not a premonitory drop had as yet fallen; though the ghastly tower of the old Priory standing out, half-clothed in its shroud of ivy, against a back-

ground of sky as black as "the Night's Plutonian shore," threatened an immediate storm.

On reaching, after a rapid walk, the peaked gate-house, she was admitted by the old portress, rather as a person who asked for shelter against the coming shower than as a visitor desirous to view the Priory; an opinion for which there was speedy warrant: for scarcely had Lady Arden set foot in the ancient hall which had so excited the pride of Althy, when a thunder-peal shook the building from "turret to foundation stone."—An evil augury to one already flurried and out of sorts!—

Mechanically, however, she followed the old lady through darkened passages leading to the turret-chambers overlooking the moat,—each of which had its legend. In the *catalogue raisonné* of the good old Sussex dame, the royal and noble benefactors of, or sojourners in Allonby Priory, were jumbled together, much after the fashion of the heathen goddesses adorning the groves of Blarney. Especially in

the old Hall. There, visions of glory seemed to cloud her aching sight. But the majesty of King John, who founded the Priory, held a meaner place in her estimation than that of the "Yarl; on whose coming-of-age, more than thirty years agone, the tenants of Allonby were feasted in that very hall, all as one as if they'd been lords in the land. And more's the pity, mum, as theres no likelyood of such another coming-of-age in either *my* time or his'n. There was a young Master Littlecote, a relation, come here a few summers ago; and we all a-thought what a pity 'twar such a fine sperity young gentleman war'n't the heir of Allonby, which the real and lawful heir, mum, is only a parson.—The Yarl comed hisself oncest, when Master Littlecote was here, and seemed as fond over him, bless-ya, (and no wonder,) as if he'd been a son of his own."

The mullioned windows of the old hall were too much obscured by the density of the storm

without, for the changes of Lady Arden's countenance to be very discernible. But as much of its contraction as was apparent to the bleared sight of the old lady, she ascribed to the probability that the stranger was "a-frighted at thunder."

"They people at Mapl'ford thinks a deal of thesselves," she added, having received no reply to her vauntings. "But bless-ya, mum, Mapl'ford parish was only pairt and pairsel of Allonby, in the good old toime. There's warrant for't in a printed book as is locked up in the libary; ay, and full partic'lars how, in they times, when Weald Forest war all as one as a howling wilderness, in the reign o' him as they called the Red King, herds o' red-deer and fallow-deer haunted up to the very moat o'the Priory; and there was big birds about the Manor, bustards and bitterns and cormorants, as plenty as now cocksparrows and cockrobins. Broad-tailed otters, too, as ware called beavers, a-building their dams in the

Lede. A'ter'ards, we come a down to 'oolves and polecats,—But, bless-ya, mum, the only vermin seen hereabout, now-a-days, is foxes and fox-hunters."

Had not Lady Arden's mind been thoroughly pre-occupied with the idea of Rupert Littlecotes, in the plural, and banquets given for their coming of age, she would perhaps have recalled the remark of a shrewd American writer, that,—morally speaking,—the moment a country is cleared from wolves, foxes abound. But she looked so weary and listless, that her *cicerone*, accustomed to exclamations and queries from the strangers to whom she exhibited the antiquities under her charge, suggested that if the lady would like a peep into the print-book, as the storm grew heavier and heavier, "she'd fetch the key o'the libary, where she could set and read comfortable, till the rain war over."

Lady Arden eagerly accepted the offer. Anything to be alone. The little turret-room,

called the library, to which they ascended by a winding staircase damp, chill, and mouldering, was a welcome refuge. No matter that the rain came down in sheets against its diamond-paned windows;—no matter that the waters of the Lede were heard dashing against the mill-dam, like the waves of an inland sea;—no matter that the crumbling old heads of the ancient Priors carved on the adjoining wall, looked grimly down upon her as she sank into the hard oak-chair, perhaps transmitted from their times.—What a relief to find herself, in that solitary, desolate "Blue Chamber!"—

The worm-eaten, walnut-wood bookcase was before her,—the rusty key in her hand. But the black quartos it contained, with their fretted, worm-eaten bindings and foxy margins that would have rejoiced the eyes of a bibliomaniac, had far less interest for *her* than the group brought before her mind's eye by the garrulous old portress. Just, however, as she

was figuring to herself the features of the "sperity young gentleman of whom the Yarl was a'most as fond as if he'd a been his own," reflecting, amidst the pattering of the rain, a cheerless stranger,—an alien, in the dim old turret-room,—how differently, but for that cruel letter of Alick Ferrier and her own imperious temper, would have passed her life, —a faint flash of lightning, so deliberately followed by the usual reverberation as to announce the subsiding of the storm, rendered visible a small volume in the old bookcase, differing strangely, in size and aspect, from the huge black folios and quartos among which it was embedded;—a calf-bound schoolboy's book, probably left there by "the young gentleman."

Yes!—On taking it hastily from the shelf, she found inscribed, on the fly-leaf of a tattered Eton grammar—

"Rupert Littlecote,
"his book—1798."

And lower down, in round childish text,—

"Rupert Littlecote, from his
dear papa. 1826."

Three years after her marriage!—

A clattering, as if a cart-pony were ascending the winding stairs, roused her from her reverie; and lo, the old portress, in her hob-nailed shoes, came curtseying and my-ladying into the room!—The Heronhurst servants, divining Lady Arden's whereabout, and concluding that she would not wish to remain at Allonby at the mercy of the storm, had driven to the gate, and desired that "Lady Arden might be informed of their arrival."

"The Countess of Arden. The real Countess come at last! Twice that day had she made her appearance, like an Avatar, to terrify and astonish wondering mortals. But to do the old portress justice, *her* conduct was the reverse of Mrs. Herbert's. In *her* feelings on

the occasion, there was nothing slavish,—nothing vulgar.—She saluted "my lady" with as cordial a feeling of delight at having to welcome to her own roof the wife of her lord, as she had kindly welcomed the stranger seeking shelter from the storm. If she had been wanting in respect—if she had failed in compliment—"she know'd my lady would take no offence, but excuse a poor old body, having come on her unawars."

My lady excused it readily; and booked the aged woman in her heart, as a trusty adherent. But she did not so easily forgive the servants of her brother-in-law for having thus officiously betrayed her. Wet shoes, a spoiled bonnet, or even a catarrh as severe as that which stationed the weeping cherubim *à perpétuité* over the tomb of her mother-in-law, would have been lighter to bear than any chance that the "Yarl" should hear of her prying into the schoolroom of the Rupert Littlecote of 1826.

On her arrival at Heronhurst, she found her niece anxious, and Althy in tears. The lightning had split a fine chesnut-tree in the park; and her daughter, certain from the length of her mother's absence, that she must have extended her drive far beyond Mapleford, was apprehensive that some serious accident might have occurred.

The affectionate reception of the two warm-hearted girls afforded to poor Lady Arden all the consolation of which her wounded feelings were susceptible after the manifold worries of the day.

CHAPTER XV.

At the close of the week, Barneson, his son, and sister, returned to Heronhurst,—grave, but not afflicted. They had been laying in the grave one long dead to them; who, in her more active days, was an unaffectionate mother. True to the last to her partialities, the old lady had bequeathed her savings and small personalty to her favourite daughter, Mrs. Knowles; while, true to *his* sense of equity, her wealthy son bestowed upon the

college of St. Margaret's, a benefaction fully equal to the benefits derived by his mother from the institution.

It gratified him to find on his arrival at home, that Lady Arden and her daughter were to be, for a month to come, his inmates. Though parliament was on the eve of prorogation, Lord Arden did not propose to establish himself at Arden Hall. On leaving town, he was to proceed to Scotland for grouse-shooting; and the deer-forest he rented in the Highlands would perhaps detain him there late in the autumn. At all events, he offered no opposition to the proposal that his family should prolong their visit to Sussex.

Either the contrast afforded by that cozy house to the comfortless palaces of Italy, or the idea of Fleecy's meaningless smile perpetually expanded before her, imparted unusual charm to the home circle of Heronhurst. Or she did not like to lose sight so soon of her gentle charge; or her frequent collision of

late with the name of her husband's cherished son, rendered her more eager than ever to establish a future home for Althy under the protection of her brother-in-law. For never had she taken such pains as now to recommend herself to the Barnesons; never had the weathergauge of her temper set so decidedly at fair.

Mark Barneson profited meanwhile by her presidency over his household, to devote a considerable portion of his time to the Bracknell Works. The multiplication of railroads, abroad and at home, had thrown into the hands of the firm more contracts than it seemed almost possible to execute. But prosperity is apt to prosper. Extension of business created extension of capital: extension of capital, extension of premises. Could poor old Matthew Lambert have returned from the dead, he would not have recognised the tremendous forges and ledgers that flourished uuder his name.

Right vexed did Sir Walter Wrottesley express himself, when he spent his Goodwood week at Mapleford, to find that, when Lady Arden and her daughter dined there once or twice, Barbara and her brother were detained at home by family mourning. *Less* vexed, however, than they supposed: his ostensible admiration of the sister of his friend being one of the *ruses* not unusual with a *very* young man intent on concealing his predilections; and as Lady Althea was willing to talk to him as much and as long as he pleased, provided he talked about her cousin, the Countess retained her erroneous impression that it was her niece rather than her daughter who had made an impression on his heart.

Such a marriage for Barbara would in every respect meet her wishes. Sir Walter was an only son, in possession of a fine estate in the North; and though his mother, Lady Emily Wrottesley, the sister of Lady Ullesmere, at

present resided with her two unmarried daughters at Wrottesley Hall, it was only till a daughter-in-law was selected to supply her place.

This was, perhaps, Sir Walter's motive for projecting an early marriage. The society of his mother and sisters was a little too serious for his taste. Lady Emily, after the untimely death of her husband in a duel provoked by a political altercation, had retired wholly from the world; and both she and her daughters dressed like nuns and talked like missionaries. Music was accounted in her ladyship's household as idle a vanity as it ever was in that of Matthew Lambert. Drawing was pronounced to be a waste of time. The Misses Wrottesley devoted their leisure to slaving at plain-work for the poor, which would have afforded profitable employment to half the village. The poor girls had been so trained to describe themselves as miserable sinners, that their young features were actually elongated by

despondency. Instead of the rosy cheeks accordant with their years, they exhibited the saturnine visages of Saints limned by some martyr-monger of the early German school. Poor girls, who had never been girls,—how small their chance of becoming reasonable and happy women!—

Of the female portion of the family, Lady Arden had heard only that they were pious and unworldly; and to such persons, the humble pedigree of her niece would afford no objection. She therefore strongly seconded her nephew's entreaties that his friend might be again invited to Heronhurst on the re-opening of the house.

That the place appeared to its new master on his return from the headquarters of smoke and tumult, a second paradise, even without including among its attractions the presence of his darling child, was not to be wondered at; for even the most fastidious critics,—even the whimsical owner of the Comus, Lord Ber-

nard Vere, a younger son of Lord Ullesmere, who boasted of having visited all the choicest gardens in the four quarters of the globe—the Alhambra, Lazienka, Belœil, Schœnbrunn, the Loo, Caserta, Oranienbaum, Damascus, Chatsworth, Trianon, the palace of Agra and kraal of the King of Timbuctoo,—declared that no *coup-d'œil* among them all could compete with that of the Heronhurst conservatory; whose slender columns and arches clothed with exotics, seemed to float in air rather than support the roof. The tinkling fountains reminded him of the Generaliffe; the tropical birds of Mexico. He would exchange the whole estate of Mapleford, he said, for that one conservatory.

Some years older than his cousin Sir Walter, or any other member of the Norwegian expedition, Lord Bernard had made the acquaintance of Barneson and Littlecote through the medium of his Weald Forest neighbour, Digby Herbert; a young man who,

though the best of the Herbert half-dozen, had little to recommend him but his sportsmanship, which amounted almost to genius. In every fishing or shooting party to which he belonged, he was the best rod, or best gun. As a deer-stalker, his right and left shots were historical from Fort William to Inverness; and people proud of their preserves, and apt to advertise in their county-newspaper their bills of slaughter, were glad of the company of a raw boy with the rough temper of a man, for the sake of his addition to the sum total.

With Rupert Littlecote, he had become intimate as a boy, tracking otters in the Lede; with Barneson, by living on the same staircase, at Baliol, and assisting him in the management of the best boat in Oxford; and when his noble neighbour set on foot the expedition to the Fiords, he contrived to get his two friends included in the party. Among his aristocratic connections, Lord Bernard had found no one inclined to renounce the London

season for a cruise in a new yacht, with an inexperienced skipper.

Such was the origin of the intimacy which brought Mapleford and Heronhurst into far closer communion than would have been accomplished by so hollow-hearted a mistress of ceremonies as Mrs. Herbert, or the sensitive mistrust of Lady Arden. The young people were constantly together; riding, walking, music-making, or billiard-playing. Edward, with his sister and cousin, Sir Walter, Lord Bernard, and as few of the Herberts as could be helped considering that Digby was *de fondation*, organised continual excursions which taxed all the powers of chaperonship of the Countess.

Lord Bernard, indeed, who was eight or ten years their senior, and by nature somewhat inert, was a less frequent visitor at Heronhurst than the rest. But *he* had not the close of the long vacation looming before him; and was occasionally in request at Mapleford,

to assist his parents in doing the honours of the house.

Deeply mortified by the coolness with which her cringing advances were met by Lady Arden, Mrs. Herbert could scarcely forgive her son's instrumentality in promoting the intimacy between the families. But Digby was too much courted out of his own tribe, to be very subservient. The most independent of the Weald Forest half-dozen, he caballed, hated and sulked on his own account, and not for the benefit of the house. The living of Mapleford, for the remote prospect of which he was receiving an university education, which would fall to the gift of Lord Ullesmere when his reverend son, Lord Lionel, glided into lawn sleeves, required, he thought, the surrender of his whole time and principles to the disposal of any member of the house of Vere.

Lord Ullesmere, meanwhile, with the sagacity for which he was so remarkable, attributed the assiduities of his son and nephew at Heron-

hurst solely to submission to his authority.—To Lord Bernard's young mate of the Comus, Ralph Stroud, a frequent guest at Mapleford, who, having little to say, was content to listen, the Marquis enlarged, again and again, upon the praiseworthy amenability of his son. "Walter Wrottesley, too, the only son of a woman whose bigotry had run away with her understanding, had been wise enough to adopt a Gamaliel somewhat more versed in the philosophy of the century; and he, Lord Ullesmere, had thought it his duty to point out to Walter and Bernard that Mr. Barneson was a man to be noticed; and was happy to find they were acting on his suggestion."

Ralph Stroud, who, in his dull promenades on the terrace with the Marquis, concealed his paucity of words by keeping a cigar perpetually in his mouth, nodded respectful assent; and every time Lord Ullesmere was informed, on inquiring for his son and nephew, that they had ridden or driven to Heronhurst, he ex-

pressed himself highly gratified by their compliance with his advice.—There was, however, ome excuse, just then, for his blindness. An insurrection had broken out in Egypt; and his lordship's private letters from Rio hinted that the new Brazilian ministry was making ducks and drakes of the imperial revenue.

Lady Arden, on the other hand, who, since she was emancipated from the trammels of Christina Barneson, had studied other axioms than the propositions of Cocker or Simson, became gradually aware of her mistake concerning the preference of young Wrottesley. She would have discovered it sooner, perhaps, had not Aunt Chrissy, whom she regarded as a housewifely check on the housekeeper and spur to the upper-housemaid, but by no means qualified for any higher department, endeavoured to open her eyes. Rhoda was one of those whom accelerated movement around them, tends to render sedentary,—the enthusiasm of others, cold,—the perspicuity of others, blind; and she

allowed Sir Walter Wrottesley to saunter about the woods with Althy, many days after she had received her first warning, only to show her contempt for the officiousness of the ex-governess.

But as usual, no sooner was the steed missing from the stable, than a padlock was ordered. By the time a strong attachment had been formed between Wrottesley and her daughter, Lady Arden signified that, though the doors of Heronhurst were open to the young baronet, it would be impossible for her to receive him at Arden Hall.—His father, a rabid politician, having considerably impoverished his estate by electioneering against the grain of his county, had, during the Rupert Littlecotehood of the Earl of Arden, attacked him more than once in the House of Commons, with all the envenomed personality which constituted, thirty years ago, an authorised engine of parliamentary warfare; and the wound thus inflicted had left a scar.

Lady Arden had more than once heard her husband denounce the tribe of Wrottesley as among the most besotted illiberals of the day.

To afford fair excuse to her lord for estrangement from his daughter, by marrying her into a family with whom he was notoriously at variance, would have been unjustifiable. While deceived into a belief that Lord Bernard was Lady Althea's favoured admirer, she had hourly congratulated herself that her choice had fallen on one whose mother was the bosom friend of Lady Lucy and Lady Leonora Bellasis, and who was consequently pretty sure of their nephew's approbation; and alas! there was no end to the evils likely to arise from her fatal misconception.

"It is so difficult to extract an opinion out of Mr. Stroud," complained poor Lady Ullesmere, to the bewildered mother, as they sat together on the yellow settee one fine evening at the end of August, while the young people

of the party were strolling in the twilight, and Lord Ullesmere and Ralph Stroud still prosing over their wine. "Mrs. Herbert gave me a hint, the other day, dear Lady Arden, which made me a little uneasy: and this afternoon, in the billiard-room, I endeavoured to sift the truth out of Mr. Stroud. But that young man so clips his words, and talks like the electric telegraph, in such short sentences, that it is hard to make out his meaning—"

"Perhaps, because he has no meaning to make out—"

"At all events, my dear, as I have known you so many years, and you are such a straightforward person, I think it better to speak out to *you* at once."

Lady Arden, foreseeing what was coming, almost wished that her character for candour had not exposed her to the explanation.

"You see, my dear, my two elder sons have made such satisfactory marriages, settling early and settling well, that Lord Ullesmere

and I are naturally anxious for Bernard to follow so good an example. And I can't say how pleased I felt when I found you were staying so near us; because there is not a house in England in which I would sooner find a daughter-in-law, than Arden Hall. Lucy, Leonora and I, have talked it over more times than you may fancy."

"You are very kind," was all that Lady Arden could find to respond; for

> she felt it as the storm is felt
> Ere seen along the sky,

that something less pleasant was to follow.

"It is not always easy to make out the intentions of young folks," added the Marchioness, mournfully; "especially when one comes to watch them through a pair of spectacles, instead of one's eyes. And ever since Mrs. Herbert kindly put me on my guard, though I have never ceased to keep mine upon Bernard every time I was in his company, I'm still a little puzzled."

"I can assure you, dear Lady Ullesmere, if *that* is what you desire to know, that your son has not the slightest predilection for my daughter."

"Ah!—Well!—I was afraid so! I wish he had,—I wish he had!—Dear me—dear me! — But on some points Lord Ullesmere is so obstinate." — A tremendous outbreak of conjugal insubordination on the part of his wife.

"I told him from the first, my dear Lady Arden, that it was very well to pay every neighbourly attention to Mr. Barneson of Heronhurst; and indeed, we have seen so very, *very* much of our friends the Herberts, that the prospect of a little change was not unacceptable. But what occasion was there for all the picnic-ings, and water-partyings, and yachtings, which he has been lately getting up, as if for the express purpose of bringing the young people together?"

"But since it was your desire to promote Lord Bernard's attention to Althy?—"

"Very true, my dear, very true! But somehow, pic-nics and that sort of thing always end by creating attachments between the wrong people. Mrs. Herbert declares that, at the last fishing-party at Allonby, Bernard's attentions to your niece were almost offensive to the rest of the party."—

"To Mrs. Herbert, perhaps:—certainly to no other person."

"At all events, not to Miss Barneson; which is the worst feature of the case. For I do assure you, that nothing would give me sincerer pain than that so charming a girl should suffer from the veto which Lord Ullesmere would most certainly issue, on the slightest hint of the matter."

"I scarcely know what you mean by the matter?" — said Lady Arden, getting angry and Rhoda-ish.

"I mean, my dear," replied the Marchioness,

finding it necessary to speak plain, "that if Walter's attentions to your child, or Bernard's to your niece, should purport more than a little flirtation, such as usually goes on when young people get together in summer-time, I should be truly sorry. My sister would certainly object to her son's marriage with a young lady accustomed to worldly display; and Lord Ullesmere would never allow his favourite son to match out of his own sphere of life."

"Concerning Lady Emily Wrottesley's opinions, I say nothing," replied Lady Arden with some dignity. "Her son, of age and independent, will probably consult his own inclinations in the choice of a wife. But even should he select my daughter, and even should she accept him, Lord Arden would perhaps object to the match. He expects a great deal for Althy; who, to say nothing of her attractions and accomplishments, is rich and high-born."

"But my sister looks upon talents and accomplishments as snares of Satan," rejoined the Marchioness, gravely: "and Walter is in no want of fortune or connection."

"Nor Althy in any haste to marry, or her parents to see her married," replied Lady Arden, rising to take leave, lest she should be provoked into stronger demonstrations of resentment. But Lady Ullesmere, who seldom worked up her courage to utter disagreeable truths or give pain to any one, thought it better to complete the operation at once,—second amputations often proving fatal.

"You will contrive, then, my dear," said she, "to express to Mr. Barneson, in some way not likely to hurt his feelings, that, though we sincerely hope to renew our neighbourly intercourse when his daughter is settled in life, he must not be offended if, so long as Bernard is in the country, our invitations to the family appear to slacken. A marriage between the young people being *utterly* and *totally* out of

the question,—in fact, Lord Ullesmere told me last night that sooner than sanction it, he would quit the country and reside on the continent,—it would be a cruel thing, to both, to allow this sort of foolish flirtation to go on."

"Cruel, indeed! — Cruel to have allowed it to begin,"—murmured Lady Arden, experiencing the same rush of blood to the heart with which she listened to Christina Barneson's humiliating homily, at the gates of Arden, twenty years before. "Two persons,—probably more,—condemned to disappointment and wretchedness, by the levity of those whose opinions, having nothing else to recommend them, should at least be consistent."

"But, my dear Lady Arden,—my dear, *dear*, Lady Arden,—" pleaded the old lady,—following her deprecatingly to the door of the saloon,—"believe me I did not intend to—"

The rest the gods dispersed in empty air!—

Lady Arden,—Rhoda,—under one of her

wildest impulses of exasperation, had summoned her daughter from the terrace, and was gone;—gone to convey a verdict of condemnation to the two young girls whose happiness was dearer to her, *far* dearer than her own.

END OF VOL. II.

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